

VIEWPOINTS ✓
ON EDUCATION
IN SRI LANKA

W. L. A. DON PETER

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A collection of addresses and essays published in the local press which contain the educational thought of a leading educationist in Sri Lanka, the Rev. Dr W. L. A. Don Peter.

“Among Catholic educators there have been both priests and religious, not to speak of laymen and laywomen, who have contributed in great measure to the educational progress of the country. Outstanding among them is the Rev. Dr W. L. A. Don Peter, an educator and educationist, who by his academic qualifications in educational science, his educational work as a teacher, school head and Church official in charge of education, his educational writings, and his outspoken views on and criticism of state policy, has risen to eminence in the educational field in Sri Lanka.”—IMPACT, Manila, Philippines, vol. 13, no. 9, Sept. 1978, p. 295.

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IN SRI LANKA

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VIEWPOINTS ON EDUCATION IN SRI LANKA

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By

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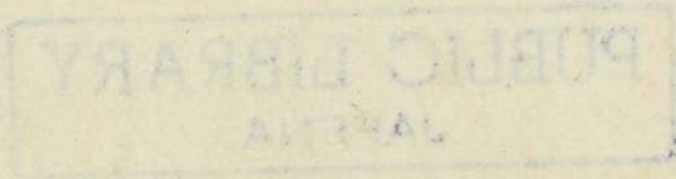
COLOMBO, SRI LANKA

1987

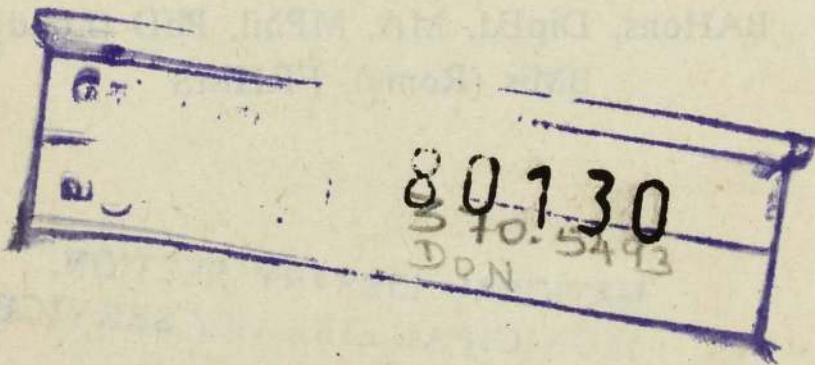
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P R E F A C E

DURING the past forty years I have not only been an interested and concerned spectator of what has been going on in this country in the field of education, but have also been actively involved in it as a teacher, school head, Church official, and member of professional educational bodies.

I do not deny that during this period there has been great progress in education, but in the same breath I shall have to say that there has also been a great deal of muddling in education by politicians. Ill-conceived, ill-planned and hasty educational changes have time and again adversely affected pupils and those who have immediate care of them—teachers and parents. In fact some of the major social ills that have afflicted us on a national scale can be traced to such changes.

In the name of the children and youth of Sri Lanka and their teachers and parents, I have candidly expressed my views when called for during the past forty years. A good part of what has been the target of criticism, as given especially in Part I of the book, now belongs to history, but do we not have to learn from the past? In any case, what I have said, and was published in the press, and sometimes editorially commented upon, has been gathered into this volume which is now before the reader.

W. L. A. Don Peter

Aquinas College,
Colombo 8.
15 August 1987

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

Studies in Ceylon Church History, pp. viii, 170, Colombo, 1963

Xavier as Educator, pp. xii, 192, New Delhi, 1974

Studies in Christian Education, pp. x, 100, Colombo, 1974

Education in Sri Lanka under the Portuguese, pp. xiv, 342, Colombo, 1978

Franciscans and Sri Lanka, ed., pp. xvi, 188, Colombo, 1983

Francis Xavier, Teacher of Nations, pp. viii, 262, Colombo, 1987

INTRODUCTION

IN the history of education in Sri Lanka, one of the most drastic changes made in the country's educational system was the state takeover, in 1960, of state-aided or 'Assisted' schools. This was done by the SLFP (Sri Lanka Freedom Party) government of the time, led by Mrs Sirimavo Bandaranaike as Prime Minister. The UNP (United National Party) was then in the opposition. The reason given for the takeover was educational reform. Legal provision for it was made by the Assisted Schools and Training Colleges (Special Provisions) Act, No. 5 of 1960, and the Assisted Schools and Training Colleges (Supplementary Provisions) Act, No. 8 of 1961.

By these Acts, all Grade III schools (primary and junior secondary), which were by far the most numerous, were taken over by the state without compensation, and schools of Grades I and II (which had senior secondary classes as well) were given the option to become private, but without any state aid and without the right to levy fees.

These schools, which till then had received financial assistance from the state, were predominantly the denominational schools, that is, schools run by religious denominations, which generally provided the lands and buildings, while the state gave financial aid in the form of payment of the salaries of eligible teachers. Thus Assisted School was almost synonymous with Denominational School.

END OF PARTNERSHIP IN EDUCATION

The Acts above mentioned brought to an end the partnership of the state and denominational bodies in education which had existed in the country from ancient times—from the time when Sinhalese kings supported in various ways the Buddhist *pirivena* and *pansala* schools which were managed by the *bhikkhus*. Under the Portuguese and the Dutch, the partnership continued, since the Church was made the agent of education and the state supplied the finances. In the British period too the partnership was maintained in the 'denominational school system' which left the management of the schools, under state supervision, in the hands of religious denominations, and the state subsidized education in one form or another. This system continued into the period of

independence. Payment of the salaries of teachers was, as we have seen, the subsidy given by the state at the time of the schools' takeover.

Apart from the termination of the partnership referred to, the takeover perpetrated the iniquity of reducing the schools that wanted to remain private to an anomalous and almost impossible situation by denying them both state aid and the right to levy fees. Since some of the leading Grade I and II Assisted Schools decided to become private even in these circumstances, a new brand of private school came into being in Sri Lanka—the non-fee-levying (NFL) private school.

The state may well refuse to give financial support to private schools, as is the practice in many countries, but where state aid is not given, the schools have the right to obtain help from the parents by way of fees. But this right was denied by law to the schools that opted to become private—barring a devious, dubious and degrading process for a parental poll, whereas charging of fees is a fundamental right of a school that receives no state aid.

Apart from the blockade of financial resources, there were several other discriminatory and destructive measures taken by the government of the time against the NFL private schools. New teachers, even if eligible and qualified, were denied pension rights; special posts were suppressed; cadeting was discontinued; pensionable teachers of the earlier Assisted Schools System could not be transferred to another school of even the same denomination without losing pension rights; pupils of other faiths could not be admitted to these schools, except with the written permission of the Director of Education; departmental circulars, etc. were not sent to these schools. In short, the NFL private schools were ostracized by the government. They were only reluctantly permitted to exist. If the government stripped them of financial resources, it was in the expectation that they would not be able to carry on and would eventually be handed over to the state, as actually happened in the case of quite a number of them.

It is a sad reflection that the schools treated in this manner were some of the oldest and best schools which over a long period had served the country very creditably, educating in them both pupils of the school's religious denomination and those of other faiths.

One of the reasons urged for the state takeover of schools was that Buddhist pupils in Christian schools received no religious education, whereas they would if such schools were run by the state. The remedy would have been to provide more accommodation in Buddhist schools or open more Buddhist schools, not the takeover of all denominational schools.

EXCRUCIATING EXPERIENCE

I was appointed Rector (principal) of St Joseph's College, Colombo—the leading Catholic boys' school in the country—just about six months after the schools' takeover, when its Rector, Fr Peter A. Pillai, retired as a school principal. I held the post for ten years, from 1961 to 1971.

The appointment placed me in the unenviable position of having to maintain a large collegiate school without any financial aid from the state and, what is worse, without being able to charge fees from parents. It was an excruciating experience in the circumstances to have to find month after month the funds needed to run the school.

The appointment also brought me into the arena in which, in the company of other school principals, I had to fight for the rights of private schools. The forum we had to air our grievances or defend our rights was the Headmasters' Conference, which later became the Conference of Headmasters and Headmistresses.

As a member, for many years, of the executive committee of the Conference, and its president thrice, I was actively involved in drafting memoranda and presenting them to the government or going on deputations to meet government authorities to obtain relief for private schools.

All this brought me into close contact with other leading educators of the time who valued freedom in education whether they were heads of state schools or of private institutions. It was a pleasurable and enriching experience for me to work with such men as S. A. Wijeyetilleke, E. A. Perusinghe and G. W. Rajapakse of Ananda College, Shelton Weerasinghe of Wesley, Dudley K. G. de Silva of Royal, S. L. M. Shafie Marikar of Zahira, Rev. A. J. C. Selvaratnam of St Thomas', R. M. Abeyewardene of Dharmapala, D. J. N. Seneviratne of St Sylvester's, C. J. Oorloff and Lionel Fernando of Trinity, Kenneth M. de Lanerolle of Kingswood, and K. Pooranampillai of St John's, Jaffna.

When the SLFP government took over schools in 1960, the United National Party, which was in the opposition, strongly opposed the government's action. When in 1965 the UNP came into power, with Mr Dudley Senanayake as the Prime Minister, we had great hopes that the new government, even if unable to return to the *status quo* of the Assisted Schools system, would at least give some relief to the NFL private schools. But we were sorely disappointed. The government, though sympathetic to private schools, did not have the courage, through fear of political repercussions, to take the decision either to allow these schools to levy fees or give them some measure of state aid.

The General Election of 1970 brought in a coalition government, that of the United Left Front, headed by Mrs Sirimavo Bandaranaike of the SLFP.

All hope of relief to NFL private schools vanished once again. Some more of the schools, unable to carry on, were handed over to the state.

RELIEF AT LAST

Then in 1977 the United National Party, now led by Mr J. R. Jayewardene, swept into power. Under his leadership the government took the bold decision to give aid to NFL private schools. Aid was to consist in the payment of salaries and pensions of eligible teachers. The decision was implemented from 1980. With state recognition given in this way, private schools, which had once been ostracized by the state, were again returned to their rightful and respected place in the educational system of the country.

Thus it was after nearly twenty years that relief came at last to private schools, thanks to the statesmanship, courage and magnanimity of the new leader of the UNP, Mr J. R. Jayewardene.

It is against this historical background that the contents of Part I of the book will have to be read. It contains the addresses given by me and the articles published in the local press relating to the schools' takeover and its aftermath. There were occasions, too, when editorial comments were made on some of my observations and remarks. The editorials are also reproduced in the book, in italics.

It will be noticed that there is some repetition, but this could hardly be avoided. The addresses were not made, nor the articles written, with a view to publishing them in book form later on.

Part II of the book contains published addresses and articles on educational subjects in general. They are however all related to education in Sri Lanka.

References are given in the book to the journals in which the addresses or articles were published. Where an address was reported in several publications, reference is made only to the one that published the fuller account.

Both articles and addresses have been slightly revised.

For permission to reproduce in this volume material originally published in their respective journals, I am most grateful to the editors.

Faint, illegible text, likely bleed-through from the reverse side of the page.

PART I
THE SCHOOLS' TAKEOVER
AND ITS AFTERMATH

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THE SCHOOL TAKOVER
AND ITS AFTERMATH

RUMBLINGS OF THE STORM

Address given as Rector of St Aloysius' Seminary,
Colombo, at its prize-giving on 7 March 1958

Pahana (annual), vol. ix, No. 9, September 1958, pp. 45-46

THE fundamental and sacrosanct right of the parents to educate their children according to the dictates of their conscience has often been violated under totalitarian governments; but there are signs that make us wonder whether the same may not happen even in our fair island. Every freedom-loving citizen must defend this right and refuse to yield to any government that wants to dictate to the parents what sort of education should be given to their children.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations categorically states that "Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children." (Article 26, 3). The state that assumes direct control of all education without consulting the wishes of the parents is violating that fundamental right.

It must be emphatically stated that it is the parents who must have the first say in the all-important question of the religious and moral education of their children. It is the parents who must decide what education should be given to their children, and where that education should be imparted.

If Catholics, urged by religious conviction, believe it to be their duty to give their children a Catholic education in a Catholic atmosphere, it is the duty of the state to help them educate their children without having to violate the claims of their conscience.

A WORKABLE SYSTEM

The denominational school system has proved to be a very workable and satisfactory solution to the problem of religious

education in this country. Denominational schools—if I am to speak in the name of Catholic schools—have been, to say the least, as efficiently run as the state schools, and have produced excellent results. Moreover, the denominational school best answers to the need for religious education in a religious environment without risk of religious discord or the watering down of religious and moral standards. What need is there then to eliminate from our educational setup a system so well tried and found successful?

The main reason put forward by those who clamour for the state takeover of all schools is that at present Buddhist children attending non-Buddhist denominational schools do not receive a Buddhist education. But how is this problem going to be solved by nationalising schools? One would have expected anyone sincerely interested in Buddhist education to have asked for more Buddhist schools. But, curiously enough, the alleged protagonists of Buddhist education demand that even the existing Buddhist schools be taken over by the state along with all other denominational schools.

If these persons, who seemingly show such solicitude for Buddhist education, prefer the state school to the Buddhist school, we have to conclude that the obvious reason for this is that the Buddhist schools have failed to realize the purpose for which they were established; in other words, that they do not give a proper Buddhist education. If this is so, it is no credit to Buddhism. As far as the Christians are concerned, they are more than satisfied with the religious education imparted in their schools and see no reason why

It is the parents who must have the first say in the all-important question of the religious and moral education of their children.

If Catholics, urged by religious conviction, believe it to be their duty to give their children a Catholic education in a Catholic atmosphere, it is the duty of the state to help them educate their children without having to violate the claims of their conscience.

The right of the parents to educate their children in the school of their choice must be stoutly defended against any attempt on the part of individuals or of governments to deprive them of it.

religious education should be surrendered to the control of secular authority. If Buddhists are not satisfied with the religious education given in their schools and feel that their children will receive a better Buddhist education in state schools, they may, if they choose, hand over their schools to the state, but why should the same be imposed on non-Buddhist schools?

BUDDHIST PUPILS IN CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

If the number of existing Buddhist schools is inadequate for the education of Buddhist children, we grant that more Buddhist schools should be established. But the fact is that there are many Buddhist parents who want their children to be educated in Christian schools, even when Buddhist schools are available. Is this because they believe that Christian schools maintain greater efficiency, better discipline, and a higher moral tone? It may be so. And if it is so, are Christian schools to blame and be penalized for doing better? Would it be a service to the country to do away with schools which have succeeded in winning the goodwill and appreciation of even parents outside their denomination?

Furthermore, it must be stressed that the Buddhist parents who send their children to Christian schools are exercising their right to have their children educated as they wish. If it is thought that Buddhist children should be educated only in Buddhist schools, what we would logically expect of the advocates of Buddhist education is that they address themselves to the parents and persuade them to withdraw their children from Christian schools and send them to Buddhist schools. And if the parents choose to do so, we have not the least objection. But what logical connection is there between Buddhist education and the extermination of Christian schools which are meant for Christian children?

We wish to insist again that in the words of the United Nations' declaration "parents have the prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children." Buddhist parents have the right to send their children to Christian schools if they wish to do so. The right of the parents to educate their children in the school of their choice must be stoutly defended against any attempt on the part of individuals or of governments to deprive them of it. Individual liberties must be preserved at any cost.

MODIFY FREE EDUCATION SYSTEM

Address given as Chief Guest at the prize-giving at Holy Family Convent, Bambalapitiya, on 5 April 1963

Times of Ceylon: 6 April 1963

THERE are private schools in other countries, in all democratic countries, including our next-door neighbour, India. In all these countries private schools are permitted to levy fees, for, a school that is not supported by the state must be supported by the parents.

But in Ceylon we have this unique type of school which is neither supported by the state, nor allowed to obtain support from the parents. This peculiar creation of ours, the non-fee-levying private school, is an anomaly in the world of education.

It is evidently to maintain the principle of free education that these private schools are not permitted to charge fees.

Free education from the kindergarten to the university is certainly a glorious thing, something very desirable, provided the country can afford it. But it has been a very costly experiment.

VOTE-CATCHING SLOGAN

The free education cry may have had an appeal to the masses ignorant of its implications. It may have served as an attractive vote-catching slogan. But surely by now it should be clear to us that this country cannot afford universal free education from the kindergarten to the university.

Free education has been largely responsible for draining the public coffers. We have been trying to cut the coat without the necessary cloth. We have been trying to acquire a 'pearl of great price' at the risk of being reduced to bankruptcy.

We for our part are not against free education. We are for it. But we feel that the type of free education we have been trying to

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How could any government, saddled with a free education system such as ours, cope with the educational needs of the growing population?

provide is not in the best interests of the country. First, the country cannot afford it. Even countries economically much better off than Ceylon have not dared to venture upon a free education scheme such as ours.

Moreover, free education is being given to a large section of the population which can well afford to fend for itself, while the poor man who really needs it is not much benefited by it.

We talk of, we boast of, education being free up to the university, but the poor man's son who is fit for university studies cannot afford to provide himself with the clothing, books, bed and board, and other expenses needed for a university course. Because of the expense involved, many poor but deserving students have to abandon the idea of a university education or their parents have to suffer great inconvenience to make it possible for their children to study in the university. The bursaries available are totally inadequate.

SHORTAGE OF FUNDS

People are quick to criticize the Minister of Education and the government for shortage of school space, staff, furniture and equipment. But how could any government, saddled with a free education system such as ours, cope with the educational needs of the growing population?

It seems to me that the root cause of our educational ills is an economic one. No government is likely to succeed in bringing

about a satisfactory solution to our educational problems until the present free education policy is modified, so as to be in keeping with the availability of funds which should be spent to the best advantage.

The Minister of Education has promised us another Education Bill. We confidently hope that it will settle some at least of our major educational problems. We trust that it will bring to an end the anomalous situation in which the non-fee-levying private schools find themselves.

OUR EDUCATIONAL ILLS

Address given as Rector of St Joseph's College,
Colombo, at its prize-giving on 9 July 1964

Times of Ceylon: 10 July 1964

THERE is no doubt that the educational system of a country has to adjust itself to changes in the social sphere. This is particularly so when great social changes take place in a country on its attaining independence after long years of subjection to foreign rule.

There certainly was need for reorganization and reorientation of education in Ceylon after independence. The old system of education had admittedly to be modified and brought into line with the changing conditions.

Sweeping educational changes have, in fact, been made in recent years. But the question is whether the changes that have been brought about are in the best interests of education. Unfortunately some of the major changes would not seem to be. This is because of a grave malady that has been plaguing education in this country for quite some time, which is that educational interests have become subordinated to political interests. Educational changes seem to have been geared to political advantage rather than to the welfare of education. Political expediency has been put before the true interests of education.

NULLIFYING FREE EDUCATION

Take, for instance, the question of free education. From the inception of this scheme many years ago, the phrase "free education" has been bandied about by the politician as an attractive slogan to capture the imagination of the masses. But the recently published 'White Paper'* on education proceeds to whittle down the content, substance, purpose, significance and value of the whole

* Proposals for a National System of Education, 1964.

scheme—in fact, to almost nullify it. What is given with one hand is being taken away with the other.

The government being unable to meet the enormous expense involved in free education has been compelled to adopt various measures, as proposed in the White Paper, to cut down the cost of education, to the detriment of the pupils.

Employing pupil teachers, as already being done on a large scale, with only an allowance paid to them; raising the school admission age to five years and the compulsory school-going age to six; automatic promotion in all the classes; restricting the GCE Prep. course to one year even in the case of science pupils; compelling all pupils, whether fit or unfit, to sit the GCE Ordinary Level examination at the end of the two-year GCE course and dismissing them from school if they do not pass in at least four subjects; not allowing any student more than two years in the GCE final-year class (a regulation already in force); not giving a pupil more than one single chance to sit the GCE Adv. Level examination—all these are measures intended to curtail educational expenditure.

The government, it would seem, has found it necessary, in a parlous situation, to adopt drastic measures, whatever the consequences to pupils. The White Paper proposals have been framed to match a bankrupt economy, and it is futile to try to hide it, or hope the public will be fooled.

DRIVING PUPILS TO TUTORIES

According to these proposals, a pupil will be given only the barest minimum of a chance of getting through his school educa-

A grave malady has been plaguing education in this country for quite some time, which is that educational interests have become subordinated to political interests.

The government that does not permit even the schools that went private to levy fees is driving pupils out of schools to fee-levying private tutors and tutorials.

The verbal eyewash of bloated boasts from public platforms that all is well with our education, that ours is, in fact, so good as to be emulated by other countries, is not going to hide the fact that our education is in a chaotic state.

tion. The aim of the White Paper seems to be to drive the pupils non-stop from class to class, whether they have attained the requisite standard of education or not, and throw them out of school as early as possible.

This will have fatal consequences. Large numbers of pupils will be stranded in their educational career. These pupils will be compelled to seek asylum in tutories or engage private tutors, provided they can afford the fees, or, in the alternative, give up their studies.

For these pupils, free education will be but a shadow of what was so pompously promised by the politicians. The kind of education that will be given them, under the label of free education, will take them nowhere. They will have to spend large sums of money, as so many are doing already, to supplement and complete their education. And, strangely enough, the government that does not permit even the schools that went private to levy fees, is driving pupils out of schools to fee-levying private tutors and tutories.

All this educational topsyturvydom is the outcome of the government's inability, for lack of financial resources, to cope with the demands of free education. The verbal eyewash of bloated boasts from public platforms that all is well with our education, that ours is, in fact, so good as to be emulated by other countries, is not going to hide the fact that our education is in a chaotic state. I do not think that parents, who are experiencing great hardship these days in getting their children educated, take such trumpet-blowing seriously.

Judging from the circumstances of the takeover of schools and the harsh measures adopted to cripple the schools that opted to go private, we find it difficult to believe that this move was not inspired by political motives.

The takeover of schools, in the way it was done, gave the impression of being a retaliation against an institution that was thought to be politically opposed to the government.

Even if it had been necessary for the state to take over schools, it could have been done in a less high-handed and more conciliatory manner, in a manner more beneficial to the country and education.

The chief cause of our educational ills is, I say again, the encroachment of politics on education. Judging from the circumstances of the takeover of schools and the harsh measures adopted to cripple the schools that opted to go private, we find it difficult to believe that this move was not inspired by political motives. The takeover, in the way it was done, gave the impression of being a retaliation against an institution that was thought to be politically opposed to the government. Even if it had been necessary for the state to take over schools, it could have been done in a less high-handed and more conciliatory manner, in a manner more beneficial to the country and education. When other countries, not only in the West but also in the East, countries like India, Japan and the Philippines, countries economically better off than Ceylon, have not only allowed but even encouraged private initiative and enterprise in education, the nationalisation of schools in Ceylon and reducing to a hapless position the schools that chose to remain independent, can hardly be said to have been motivated by purely educational considerations.

EDITORIAL

The following Editorial appeared in
the 'Daily Mirror' of 13 July 1964

Among those national traits in acute short supply in Ceylon is public opinion.

Tongue-waggers on public affairs are generally confined to drawing rooms or bar rooms, railway compartments and bus queues.

The predominant interest of the Ceylonese is self-interest.

If tomorrow the Head of the State announces that ten Zulus—or Eskimos for that matter—would be “imported” to run the country in the name of progress, a million “ayes” will chorus approval.

No one gives a damn, so long as three square meals (rice and curry, of course) are laid on, and the odd bottle of arrack is thrown in, with the latest in sarees and make-up tossed in for good measure.

“I know,” said that eminent Frenchman Talleyrand, “where there is more wisdom than is found in Napoleon, Voltaire, or in all the ministers present and to come—in public opinion.”

Talleyrand, of course, reckoned without Ceylon.

What public opinion is there, for instance, on the crumbling structure of education in Ceylon?

Are parents, constituting we presume the bulk of the population, so stone blind that they cannot see the chaos that is setting in?

The Rector of St Joseph's College, in a forthright analysis of the educational body on prize-day dissected surgeon-wise the many ills that assail it.

"Employing pupil teachers, as is being already done on a large scale: raising the school admission age to six: automatic promotions in all classes: compelling all pupils whether fit or unfit to sit the GCE course and dismissing them from school if they do not pass in at least four subjects: not giving more than one chance to sit the GCE Advanced Level."

This is as fearful a catalogue of the ominous signs of education deterioration as that which any vigilant sentinel of education could summon.

The Rector of St Joseph's has alerted parents, who in the name of their children and of the future, must whip up nation-wide opinion and immediately arrest these downward trends.

HEROIC SURVIVAL

Address given as Rector of St Joseph's College,
Colombo, at its prize-giving on 26 July 1967

Daily Mirror, 27 July 1967

FOR six and a half years the non-fee-levying private schools have been through the ordeal of trying to survive without any state aid and without being able to charge fees. Some have succumbed under the financial burden they had to bear. Even in the case of schools that have survived, the effort has told heavily on those who had the responsibility of running them. To principals in particular it has been a nightmarish experience to keep the schools going. In addition to their educational work, which is normally heavy enough, they have often been burdened also with the task of raising funds. The wonder is that these schools have survived at all.

The heroic survival for so long of non-fee-levying private schools against the restrictions and disabilities imposed on them, will, I am sure, be recorded in future histories of education as one of the most remarkable episodes in the educational history of this country. The keenness shown by parents and old boys to keep the schools private, at great cost to themselves, is proof enough that state monopoly of education is strongly discountenanced by them, and that they want a place in the country for independent schools.

GRAVE INJUSTICE

If we have carried on for so long, and at such cost, it was with the hope that wiser counsel would prevail and justice would be done to our schools. For there is no doubt that a grave injustice has been done to us. In 1960 the government allowed Grade I and II schools to go private. Be it noted that in doing so the S.L.F.P. government recognized, accepted and implemented the principle of private-school education. But at the same time it perpetrated the injustice of denying to these schools their means of existence. It is this injustice that remains to be redressed.

The heroic survival for so long of non-fee-levying private schools against the restrictions and disabilities imposed on them will, I am sure, be recorded in future histories of education as one of the most remarkable episodes in the educational history of this country.

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countenanced by them and they want a place in the country for independent schools.**

The parents of pupils in private schools have a right to their share of the funds expended by the government on education, as they too contribute their share to the state revenues. But if the government is unable to give, in one form or another, financial assistance to private schools, it should at least give them the right to levy a reasonable fee. If the government were to pass a law that private hospitals should not charge fees, that private owners of houses should let them out without rent, that shops should distribute their wares free, what would you think of such a law? The law that forbids a private school to levy fees is equally unjust.

There are already fee-levying private schools in this country. Even the S.L.F.P. government, in 1960, allowed such schools to continue—once more endorsing private-school education. Our schools too had the right, given by the Education Act No. 5 of 1951, of opting to become fee-levying private schools, but that right, exercised by us in October 1960, was also unjustly nullified by retrospective legislation in November of the same year.

The parents of pupils in private schools have a right to their share of the funds expended by the government on education, as they too contribute their share to the state revenues.

If the government were to pass a law that private hospitals should not charge fees, what would you think of such a law? The law that forbids a private school to levy fees is equally unjust.

GIVE US RELIEF

If the present government, like the last, is willing to let private schools exist, which is certainly most desirable educationally, then let it boldly repair the injustice done to our schools by the last government, which, strange to say, while permitting private schools, passed legislation, at the same time, to strangle them. We sincerely hope that the new Education Bill, which I trust will be introduced in parliament soon, will give us relief to enable us to contribute our share to education in this country, as we have done in no small measure in the past.

And if the solution to our financial problem is going to be the right to levy fees, every effort must be made to see that a deserving pupil who is unable to pay fees is not excluded from our schools. Scholarships will have to be provided for the education of such pupils.

EDITORIAL

The following Editorial appeared in the
'Times of Ceylon' of 28 July 1967

"Heroic survival" is right. This was the expression the Rector of St Joseph's College, Colombo, used in reference to private non-fee-levying schools which have continued to exist in the face of formidable obstacles.

The Rector, the Revd Fr W. L. A Don Peter, was also right in attributing the heroic survival of the schools, at great cost to parents and old boys, to the fact that state monopoly of education is strongly "discouraged". This in spite of the fact that parents who choose to send their children to schools like St Joseph's contribute their share to state revenue and, therefore, have a right to, but do not get a share of, the funds spent by the government on education.

The significant point about the tremendous odds with which private non-fee-levying schools have to contend is that they were deliberately and viciously created by the previous government. But, as the Prime Minister who ordained this state of things, Mrs Bandaranaike, made clear in the by-election campaign at Negombo, the present government does not have the courage to deal with the problem.

Mrs Bandaranaike's government, as well as governments before and after, recognized that private schools have a place in our edu-

cation system. Leaders of the present government, from the Prime Minister down, have taken pains to emphasise the fact.

Accepting the principle, Mrs Bandaranaike's government yet denied to them the means of existence, by way of fees or by government grant in lieu.

Actually it went so far as to take away by retroactive legislation the right, given under the Education (Amendment) Act of 1951, assisted schools had to opt out of the free scheme.

The UNP-led government, we repeat, is under a moral obligation to right such wrongs if only because it was during the regime of the first Prime Minister, Mr D. S. Senanayake, that the assisted schools (as they then were) were persuaded to join the free scheme on the particular understanding that they could, if they so wished, opt out of it.

Fr Don Peter makes a pertinent point when he asks what you would think of a law which stipulates that, for instance, private hospitals (of which there are many) should not charge fees.

There are, even now, private schools which charge fees, from reputable old schools like St Thomas' and Trinity to dubious cram shops. But schools like St Joseph's, which are no less reputable than St Thomas' or Trinity (to pick them up at random) and have done no less service to the country, are penalised only because they made the mistake—as we must think—of being persuaded, under guarantees, to join the free scheme, at one time.

Is there no sense of honour at government level?

ARE CATHOLICS BEING FOOLED?

Written by the author under the pseudonym 'Tovarich'

Daily Mirror: 7 December 1967

AT the Zahira College Old Boys' dinner on November 19th, to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the school, the Revd Dr W. L. A. Don Peter, Rector of St Joseph's College, replying to the toast of the guests said:

"In 1960 when our schools decided to go private we knew we were taking upon ourselves an intolerable financial burden and that we would not be able to carry on for long as non-fee-levying private schools. Why then did we decide to go private? Our decision was built on hope. We were hoping that before long there would come on the scene men with a sense of justice and fairplay who would bring to an end the unhappy situation in which we were placed as non-fee-levying private schools. When will that day of deliverance dawn? Perhaps tomorrow. According to newspaper reports, the new Education Bill will be tabled in Parliament tomorrow. Let us hope that the new bill will bring us relief, and schools like Zahira which have contributed so much to education in the past will be provided with the means of continuing their good work."

The bill has come, but not the long-awaited relief for non-fee-levying private schools.

At the last prize-giving at Ananda College, the chief guest, Dr G. P. Malalasekera, paid a tribute to the Christians who, he said, had shown great vision and courage in deciding to keep their schools private and independent, at great cost to themselves.

CATHOLICS LET DOWN

The great majority of the schools which became private in 1960 were Catholic schools.

It is the Catholics mostly who now find themselves let down by the present government.

The irony of it is that the UNP which so vociferously opposed the schools' takeover bill in 1960 is now perpetuating with this new bill the very injustices it decried and opposed when it was in the opposition.

If this government is opposed to private-school education, then let it boldly say so, and take over all the private schools, whether fee-levying or non-fee-levying. If on the other hand, it is prepared to let private schools exist, then let it give all private schools the same status with the right to levy fees.

But the new bill does not do so. It seems to want to perpetuate the present obnoxious and unwarranted distinction between the fee-levying private schools and the non-fee-levying private schools.

Those who had entertained the hope that the UNP government would have the courage to abolish forever the anomaly that the non-fee-levying private school is have been sadly disillusioned.

BLATANT DISCRIMINATION

In the new bill there is blatant discrimination against the schools which became private in 1960, most of which are Catholic schools.

Those who entertained the hope that the UNP government would have the courage to abolish forever the anomaly that the non-fee-levying private school is have been disillusioned.

One would have expected this government to have had the guts to declare openly that, to right the wrongs of the last government, the non-fee-levying private schools would be given the same status as that of private schools like St Thomas'.

If non-fee-levying private schools are going to be allowed to charge a 'prescribed' fee, whatever that may mean, how can they be labelled (as the bill does) as 'non-fee-levying' schools?

The last government created the monstrosity we know as the 'non-fee-levying private school'. Is the present government seeking to do one better than the last in producing a 'non-fee-levying fee-levying school'?

Schools, like St Thomas' College, which became private in 1951, can levy fees without restriction, but in the case of schools that went private in 1960 "there shall be no levy directly or indirectly from the pupils of any fees other than those prescribed." Sec. 17 (1) (d).

If both categories of schools are private institutions (the bill itself recognises them as such), why this distinction and discrimination in regard to their right to levy fees?

If the fee that is to be "prescribed" is intended to be nothing more than an enhanced facilities fee, whereas schools like St Thomas' are free to charge the fees they need, then there is no denying the fact that the 1960 type of private school is being unjustly discriminated against.

GOVERNMENT WITHOUT GUTS

If by "prescribe" it is intended, on the other hand, to permit these schools to levy fees like St Thomas', then why this devious and circuitous meandering, when one would have expected this government to have had the guts to declare openly that, to right the wrongs of the last government, the non-fee-levying private schools would be given the same status as that of private schools like St Thomas'?

And if non-fee-levying schools are going to be allowed to charge a "prescribed" fee, whatever that may mean, how can they be labelled (as the bill does) as 'non-fee-levying' schools? Secs. 16 and 35 (2) (0).

The last government created the monstrosity we know as the 'non-fee-levying private school'. Is the present government seeking to do one better than the last in producing a 'non-fee-levying fee-levying school'?

With a little goodwill and courage on the part of the government, the long-winding and discriminatory section 17 of the bill could have been replaced by another, equating the schools which elected to be private and unaided under the provisions of the Assisted Schools and Training Colleges (Special Provisions) Act, No. 5 of 1960, with schools which were not assisted schools within the meaning of the Education Regulations of 1951, made under section 17 of the Education (Amendment) Act, No. 5 of 1951.

Then there would be only one type of private school, unaided and fee-levying. Then there would be justice and equity. Then only would the wrongs of the last government be righted.

COUP DE GRACE

The non-fee-levying private schools, which have had to carry a heavy financial burden for a longer period than they had bargained for, are now on their last legs. It is certain that if they are not going to be given a substantial grant by the government, or the same status as that of fee-levying schools like St Thomas', they will have to be handed over to the government. This government will then have the credit of having given the *coup de grace* to the Catholic schools which the former government sought to annihilate by slow strangulation.

Catholics who have been deprived of their Sunday are now on the verge of being denied even the pittance they had been expecting from the present government—the legitimate right of a private school to levy fees, if it is not aided by the State. It is time that the Catholics took a serious view of the situation. They cannot allow themselves to be fooled.

THE CATHOLICS HAVE BEEN FOOLED

Written by the author under the pseudonym 'Tovarich'

Daily Mirror: 25 January 1968

“**A**RE Catholics being fooled?” was the title of an article which appeared in the *Daily Mirror* of December 7th. What seemed doubtful then hardly leaves room for doubt now. Recent events seem to confirm the view that the Catholics have in fact been fooled by the UNP and its allies.

Catholics have always given pride of place to religion in education. For them, religious education is much more than the teaching of religious tenets for one period of the day. Religious education is training the child to a way of life marked out by the tenets and moral code of the religion. It is an educational process that must go on throughout the day, in the classroom and outside, in the school and in the home.

Such an education can be imparted only in a school (or home) where a religious atmosphere prevails. Many things go to make that atmosphere. An atmosphere of that nature prevailed, to a great extent, in the former denominational schools. I grant they were not altogether perfect institutions even from the religious point of view, but certainly they were schools which provided a religious education far better than what obtains in most schools under government management.

At the schools' takeover in 1960, option to go private was given only to Grade I and Grade II schools. Going private, without the right to levy fees and without state assistance, meant shouldering a very heavy financial burden. However, the Church and the Catholic community were prepared, for the sake of the religious education of the Catholic pupils, to shoulder that burden for the time being, hoping that relief would come with a change of government.

QUONDAM OPPONENTS OF THE TAKEOVER

In 1960, the UNP, which was then in the opposition, staunchly opposed the move by the SLFP government to take over the schools.

Speech after speech was made in parliament by UNP leaders condemning the takeover. If Catholics placed their hope in such men, and expected redress from them, it was a justifiable hope. So strongly and so vehemently did the UNP at that time decry the injustice of the takeover.

But the Catholics have been hoping in vain. Nearly three years have passed since the present government came to power, but so far nothing has been done to settle the vexed question of the non-fee-levying private schools.

It is rumoured that just before the Negombo by-election, the government leaders gave the Church authorities a written undertaking that the new education bill would give relief to the private schools. The Negombo election has come and gone, but the non-

Politicians must of course see to themselves first; everything else comes after. Winning an election is the main thing.

Wait for the next election. They will come again. They will come on all fours to your feet; they will be all smiles; they will attend your functions in full strength; they will promise you the moon. But after the election they will give you umpteen reasons as to why what was then promised cannot now be granted.

fee-levying schools remain as they were, in a precarious position, hardly able to survive any longer. Three of them have in fact been recently handed over to the state—Christ King College (Tudella), St Mary's College (Negombo) and St John Bosco's (Hanwella).

According to newspaper reports, the new education bill has been shelved. Perhaps there will be no education bill this side of the next general election. If that is so, the non-fee-levying schools have no hope of immediate relief, and they are doomed.

UNTRUSTWORTHY POLITICIANS

Politicians must, of course, see to themselves first; everything else comes after. Winning an election is the main thing—whether the Negombo by-election or the next general election. Other

things don't matter. Promises made at election time can conveniently be forgotten once the election is over.

Wait for the next election. They will come again. They will come on all fours to your feet; they will be all smiles; they will attend your functions in full strength; they will promise you the moon. But after the election they will give you umpteen reasons as to why what was then promised cannot now be granted.

The Catholics have been fooled. The hopes they had entertained that they would be granted redress have been shattered. The promises made to them have not been worth the paper on which they were written. Had the Catholics known that this was going to be the fate of even the few schools they were hoping to salvage from the debris left by the last government, they would have handed them over in 1960 itself.

But now they have the painful experience of having to hand over their schools after spending millions of rupees for their maintenance in the past seven years. The last state is worse than the first. The Catholics have been well and truly fooled. All Catholics would not have been able to send their children to the few Catholic private schools. But all must remember that the loss of these schools is a loss to the entire Catholic community, which has already lost the Sunday holiday since the present government came on the scene. These are the things that really matter to Catholics, not portfolios to Catholic ministerial aspirants.

POLITICS CURSE OF EDUCATION

**Address given as President of the Ceylon Conference
of Headmasters and Headmistresses at its 33rd Annual
General Meeting on 28 September 1968**

Daily Mirror: 30 September 1968

YOU will, I presume, agree with me that for us educators and educationists, it is a matter for deep regret that politics has long been the bane of education in this country. It must be confessed, even at the risk of rousing the wrath and incurring the displeasure of the powers that be, that meddling and muddling by politicians, and the tinkering with education by one Education Minister after another, are largely to blame for our educational ills.

With scant regard for the views of educators, politicians have all too often had their own way, with unfortunate results. Worse still, educators have been reduced to a position of subservience and impotence, so that they are unable even to freely speak out their minds.

The prime concern of the politician being, as a rule, to keep his seat in parliament somehow, all other matters have to be subordinated to that. It often happens that the politician's course of action is influenced, not by considerations in the best interests of education, but by the prospect of securing support for himself to remain in power.

BLUNDERS IN EDUCATIONAL POLICY

Free education is a case in point. Not even Japan, economically the most progressive country in Asia, has attempted to provide free education to all pupils, from the kindergarten to the university. In Japan, only compulsory education, from age 6 to 15, is free. Beyond that, the government has a scholarship scheme to assist deserving pupils, but those who obtain assistance are required to refund, within twenty years after graduation, the money loaned to them by the government.

In Ceylon, the politicians paid no heed to the views and recommendations of knowledgeable educationists. Free education to every mother's son was a catchy slogan that could be bandied about to win the votes of the masses. Politicians had their way, and today we are faced with many problems as a result of it, not the least of which is that we are an impoverished nation, perpetually turning to other nations with the begging bowl.

The manner of change-over to *svabhāṣā* was another blunder our politicians perpetrated. There is not the least doubt that the old discriminatory dual system of English and vernacular schools had to be done away with, but this should have been done without detriment to English, a language of such importance today, especially for higher education.

The politicians saw in the *svabhāṣā* cry a chance to win over the masses for their own personal gain. They cared little for what unfortunate results would eventually follow from their policy. They paid no heed to the remonstrations of educationists. Today we bemoan the decline of English in our schools, the poor quality of our *svabhāṣā* graduates, and the parlous position in which our *svabhāṣā*-educated science students find themselves when they have to do higher studies. But the politicians who waxed eloquent over the importance of *svabhāṣā* and imposed *svabhāṣā* on their fellow-countrymen, see to it that their own children are somehow educated in the best institutions in the West.

The takeover of schools was another fatal blow struck against education by politicians. It can hardly be doubted that the takeover was a vindictive step inspired by political considerations. As educationists, we ourselves knew only too well that the old system

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It often happens that the politician's course of action is influenced, not by considerations in the best interests of education, but by the prospect of securing support for himself to remain in power.

had to be reorganized with greater emphasis on science and technology. But that could have been done without destroying altogether a system which had proved to be a very workable one of partnership between the state and denominational bodies, a system which had been an asset to the state and relieved it of a large part of the educational burden. Today the state has to carry the burden single-handed and, I am afraid, it has not proved itself equal to the task.

The United National Party, which was in the opposition at the time of the takeover, rightly opposed it. One would have expected the UNP, once in power, to repair the injustice done by the last government. But it has not done so. The promise given before the Negombo by-election that private schools would be given relief was doubtless prompted by political motives. And, once more, it is presumably political considerations that hold back the government from fulfilling its promises.

POLITICAL INTERFERENCE

To come down to the local scene, there are the local politicians who interfere in school matters, to the detriment of education. Mr Dick, M.P. wants the children of his supporters to be somehow admitted to the school, whatever may become of the other applicants; Mr Tom, M.P. will get teachers who support him appointed to the staff, whether according to their qualifications they fit into the staff or not; Mr Harry, M.P. will want his supporter's son, dismissed from school for indiscipline, taken back into the school; the principal has to be tolerant of even recalcitrant members of the staff, if they happen to be the friends and supporters of politicians, lest he get into trouble with the politicians, with dire consequences.

There is not the least doubt that the old discriminatory dual system of English and vernacular schools had to be done away with, but this should have been done without detriment to English.

The politicians who waxed eloquent over the importance of svabhasa and imposed svabhasa on their fellow-countrymen, see to it that their own children are somehow educated in the best institutions in the West.

Politicians and their henchmen are generally impatient to implement schemes that have propaganda value for themselves, whatever their value from the pedagogical point of view.

We cannot get out of the present mess and do something worthwhile for our children unless politicians are prepared to lift education above party politics and be guided by educators and educationists.

These are not imaginary situations. This is what is daily happening around us. The result of all this is that the principal's freedom is curtailed and his initiative stifled, and consequently education and discipline in the school will suffer disastrously.

Is it not true, then, that politics has been the bane of education in this country?.....We cannot get out of the present mess and do something worthwhile for our children unless politicians are prepared to lift education above party politics and be guided by educators and educationists. In the past, many decisions have been taken by the Government, the Ministry or the Department without careful study, research, planning and experimentation. Politicians and their henchmen are generally impatient to implement schemes that have propaganda value for themselves, whatever their value from the pedagogical point of view. Various schemes implemented in a hurry have had to be withdrawn or revised when wiser counsel prevailed. You know, for instance, that the new language syllabuses have been drawn up without sufficient research and planning, and the model papers designed badly. You know what happened to the new English Language book that was printed by the Department for the GCE O/L class. Such blundering can hardly be excused. As always, it is the pupils who are the victims.

Lack of research, advance planning and wise implementation has been, to my mind, the greatest drawback in Ceylon education. There is need in this country of an educational research institute or department, well staffed and well equipped, to study, with the assistance of practising educators, all aspects of educational planning and development, on a long-term basis, and without being subject to political meddling and the whims and vagaries of changing ministers of education and governments. It seems to me that it is only a competent institute of this nature that can plan education in this country on a sound footing and with a hopeful future.

EDITORIAL

On the same day, 30 September 1968, the following Editorial appeared in the 'Daily Mirror'

Seldom has Ceylon basked in such a sunburst of scorching truth as that which blazed from the lips of the Rector of St Joseph's College, Mgr Don Peter, in his Presidential address at the Conference of Ceylon Headmasters and Headmistresses over the weekend (see story alongside).

Free from the clouds of banalities and platitudes that usually blur Presidential addresses, the Josephian Rector's speech was a glow of factual light illuminating the whole murky educational landscape.

For once we had the full and free flow of the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. It is a most refreshing and heart-warming experience to see a public man at a public place, without the least regard for the consequences, courageously pour out the undiluted, unadulterated truth, come what may.

If only we had a score of such fearless, forthright men who are dedicated to the truth in the interests of the nation, and who give unfettered expression to it, Ceylon would not have been razed to the shambles it is in today.

We note with pleasure that almost to the last syllable the Reverend Rector of St Joseph's College has echoed and re-echoed sentiments that we have expressed in this column, morning after morning, over the last few years. Now that a man of Mgr Don Peter's distinction has articulated them, the impact should be the greater.

None but the blind and mentally deficient will contest his contention which dominates the whole speech that politics and politicians are the bane of education. Nowhere in the world, not even in regimented Russia, has education been so mauled and maltreated by politicians as in Ceylon.

Nothing could be truer or so succinctly summed up as the President's observation that: "The prime concern of the politician being as a rule to keep his seat in Parliament somehow, all other matters have to be subordinate to that. It often happens that the politician's course of action is influenced not by considerations in the best interests of education, but by the prospect of securing support for himself to remain in power."

Mgr Don Peter's Presidential address is yanked out of the common rut not only because of his no-punches-pulled approach but also because truth parades in his speech sans frills and flourishes, sans paint and polish but undressed and unadorned.

Truth not merely hurts, but haunts particularly when it is free from the trammels of trimming, in short, when it is naked and unafraid.

And what Mgr Don Peter has so tersely said about education in Ceylon is just that—the naked truth.

TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE

Written by the author under the pseudonym 'Tovarich'

Daily Mirror: 3 December 1969

In spite of numerous assurances by the government that private non-fee-levying schools will be afforded some form of relief, their problems have not been solved one bit. In this connection, we publish today a letter from an eminent educationist who writes under the pseudonym "Tovarich" in which he spotlights the plight of these schools and the broken pledges—Editor.

THE *Daily Mirror* of November 29th reported that the Prime Minister "is expected to summon a conference of the owners of private non-fee-levying schools shortly to listen to their grievances." This is good news indeed, but, I must confess, it sounds too good to be true. Those of us who have been concerned about the survival, welfare and future of these schools have been so bitterly disappointed by the present government these past five years, that now we find it difficult to believe that the government would make any move, even at this late stage, to solve this problem. However, let us hope that the newspaper report is correct.

GRIEVANCES NOT UNKNOWN TO GOVERNMENT

It appears, according to the report, that the Prime Minister wishes to "listen to the grievances"—to "give a patient hearing to the outstanding problems"—of the proprietors of non-fee-levying private schools. During the past five years, so many memoranda have been submitted to the Prime Minister and the Minister of Education on this subject by various organizations representing these schools, and so many deputations have met them, that the Prime Minister and the Minister of Education should, by now, know by heart, backwards and forwards, what these grievances are. What is really necessary, therefore, is not to summon a conference, but to have the guts to take steps to solve the problem. And that exactly is what has been conspicuously lacking in the government all these past five years.

In 1960, the UNP, then in the opposition, loudly decried the takeover of schools and voted against it. At the takeover, some of the leading schools, most of them Catholic, exercising the option given them, went private, but with the awful burden of having to fend for themselves for their finances, as they were both prohibited by law to levy fees and denied state assistance. Many of us entertained the hope that when the UNP came back to power, it would set things right—that justice would be done to these schools.

But what the National Government did, as soon as it gained power, was to make Sunday a working day and give the Buddhists their Poya holiday. It must be said to the credit of the Christians that they did not grudge their Buddhist brethren their holiday on Poya day to enable them to attend to their religious observances. Whether the Poya holiday has in fact been an asset to Buddhism in this country is quite another matter which I do not wish to discuss here. But, to be deprived of their Sunday holiday and face hardship in fulfilling their Sunday duties was a big sacrifice the Christians had to make for the sake of their Buddhist compatriots.

The schools question, which vexed the Catholics in particular, could also have been solved with equal concern, but the government completely ignored it. One begins to wonder whether the reason for this is that the Catholics are only a minority and their vote at

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The schools question, which vexed the Catholics in particular, could also have been solved with equal concern, but the government completely ignored it.

election time does not count for much. In any case, Catholics have to take serious note of the fact that, although the National Government has now nearly run its full course, nothing has so far been done to seek a solution to the schools problem.

APPEALS FELL ON DEAF EARS

At nearly every prize-giving during the past five years, principals of non-fee-levying private schools have talked about the disabilities

to which their schools have been subjected, and repeatedly appealed to the government for help, but their appeals have fallen on deaf ears.

It will be remembered that just before the Negombo by-election a promise was made in writing, on behalf of the government, that non-fee-levying schools would be given relief. Those days it used to be said, in fact, that these schools would be raised to the same position as that of the Premier's own school, St Thomas' College. But, as everybody knows, the promise turned out to be a bogus one. Pardon the word, but let me call a spade a spade.

It can hardly be doubted that the takeover of schools was in the main a retaliatory measure against a community that was thought to be closely allied with the UNP. In fact, one begins to wonder if the schools would have been taken over at all if that had not been the case. We have to learn from past mistakes.

The Catholics are not asking for favours or privileges. They are only asking for justice. Even the last government, by the very fact of its giving schools the right to opt to become private, upheld the principle of private-school education. The injustice it perpetrated was to deny to these schools their legitimate means of support. It is here that a greater sense of justice and fairplay was expected of the present government. But, all along, we have been sorely disappointed.

If the government is going to make an attempt, even at this eleventh hour, to find a satisfactory solution to this problem, it certainly is a move in the right direction.

WONDER PRIVATE SCHOOLS SURVIVE

Address given as Chief Guest at the prize-giving at
St Patrick's College, Jaffna, on 18 May 1979

Daily Mirror: 30 May 1979

I CANNOT say how grateful I am to Fr Rector for inviting me to be the chief guest at this function, although my connections with St Patrick's have been very slender. Years ago, in the nineteen-forties, when I was on the staff of St Joseph's College, Colombo, of which Fr Peter Pillai was then the Rector, I used to meet two great Rectors of St Patrick's, when they came down to Colombo and stayed with us at St Joseph's, Fr Matthews and Fr Long. From them we got information about education not only at St Patrick's but also in Jaffna and we were able also to discuss with them educational problems affecting the whole country.

At a later date, when I was myself Rector of St Joseph's and a member, and several times President, of the Conference of Headmasters and Headmistresses, I used to meet at our gatherings my counterpart at St Patrick's, first Fr Jeevaratnam and later Fr Mathuranayagam. These were educators who made weighty contributions to our attempts to solve our educational problems, especially those confronting non-fee-levying private schools.

Moreover, I used to meet, and still meet, especially as Rector of Aquinas, past students of St Patrick's, either as members of our staff or as students, and I always find them to be very appreciative of the education they had received at this venerable institution and proud to be old boys of St Patrick's.

SUCCESS AGAINST ODDS

Apart from my connections with St Patrick's, however slight they may have been, it is always a source of pleasure and satisfaction for me, as one who has spent almost his whole life in the education of children and youth, to assist at a function like this, a function that brings joy to pupils who have done well and to their parents, a

The iniquitous schools' takeover laws of 1960 and 1961 sought to cripple and eventually annihilate private schools, and that, surprisingly enough, while accepting the principle of private-school education in Sri Lanka.

In Sri Lanka we have the strange and anomalous situation of private schools being allowed to exist, but without the means of existence.

function that has a bearing on the whole school, and is perhaps the most important function of the school year, when the Rector, staff, students, parents and old boys take a look at what the school has been able to achieve during the year, and what problems it has had to face.

Having listened to the Rector's report, all of you will agree with me, I am sure, that the school is to be warmly congratulated, and doubly so, for, what it has achieved, which would be very creditable in normal circumstances, has been achieved against many odds which non-fee-levying private schools have to face, and have now faced for nearly twenty years.

The iniquitous schools' takeover laws of 1960 and 1961 sought to cripple and eventually annihilate private schools, and that, surprisingly enough, while accepting the principle of private-school education in Sri Lanka. If all schools had been nationalized, that would have been another matter. But here in Sri Lanka we have the strange and anomalous situation of private schools being allowed to exist, but without the means of existence.

Schools some of which have a long history of educational service to the nation were overnight made beggar schools and they continue to be the beggar schools of the nation, living on alms.

The heroic survival of non-fee-levying schools for so long a period as nearly twenty years, in spite of their being bound by legal fetters and reduced to beggary, is admittedly a unique episode in the educational history of Sri Lanka.

But the wonder of wonders is that in spite of such oppressive and discriminatory legislation, so many of our private schools have not only been able to survive but even maintain high standards, so much so that year after year it becomes a headache for the principals of these schools to meet the demand for admissions.

BEGGAR SCHOOLS OF THE NATION

By cutting off state aid and prohibiting the levy of fees, the government reduced these schools to beggary. Schools some of which, like St Patrick's, have a long history of educational service to the nation, were overnight made beggar schools and they continue to be the beggar schools of the nation, living on alms, euphemistically called donations, and sometimes impelled even to resort to artful ways of getting alms, as beggars are wont to do.

However, thanks to the generosity of parents, old boys and well-wishers, and the dedication of principals and staff, these schools have successfully met the challenge of the blatant injustice of the 1960 government and the weak-kneed indifference of successive governments which have failed to put things right. The heroic survival of non-fee-levying schools for so long a period as nearly twenty years, in spite of their being bound by legal fetters and reduced to beggary, is admittedly a unique episode in the educational history of Sri Lanka, and an eloquent proof that there are people in this country who value freedom in education.

As you will notice, nearly two decades have now passed since this strange brand of school, the non-fee-levying private school, was created. We were hoping that the United National Party, which opposed the schools' takeover when it was in the opposition in 1960, would, after it came into power in 1965, repair the injustice done to these schools. So many appeals were made to the government, so many memoranda were submitted by various bodies, and so many representations were made. I myself, as President of the Headmasters' Conference, led deputations to the Minister of Education of that time. I remember also the occasion when a high-level Church deputation, of which I was a member, met the Prime Minister himself. But nothing came of all this. The government of that time, though perhaps conscious of the need to right the wrongs done to these schools, did not seem to have had the guts to do it.

ENCOURAGING SIGNS

Today we have another UNP government, a government that believes in the value and role of private sector participation with the

government. It would be in keeping with such a policy to give the private sector, especially the religious sector, partnership in the educational field. There are encouraging signs that the present government is at long last going to take meaningful steps to solve the private schools' problem.

We sincerely hope that the government's efforts will lead to a satisfactory solution. May we hope, too, that this solution will be found before we reach the twentieth year since the infamously historic event of the creation of the non-fee-levying private school in Sri Lanka. It is in this context that, while congratulating you, Father Rector, and your staff and students on the success you have gained in the past year, I wish you a happier, brighter and more successful new academic year, and many such years in the future.

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JAFFNA.

COURAGEOUS AND MAGNANIMOUS GESTURE

Article in the 'Daily News', 27 June 1979

IT was just a month ago that as chief guest at the annual prize-giving at St Partick's College, Jaffna, I said: "There are encouraging signs that the present government is at long last going to take meaningful steps to solve the private schools' problem. We sincerely hope that the government's efforts will lead to a satisfactory solution. May we hope, too, that this solution will be found before we reach the twentieth year since the infamously historic event of the creation of the non-fee-levying private school in Sri Lanka."

According to reports in the press last week, the solution has come at last, well before the twentieth year. We are told that the government has decided to finance these schools. I have myself been head for ten years of a large non-fee-levying private school and have gone through the agonizing and nightmarish experience of having to find the funds month after month to run the school. I can therefore quite understand the relief the news will bring to the proprietors, principals, staff, parents and past pupils of these schools. Their perseverance in the heroic and almost impossible task of financing the schools, in the name of the principles they stood for, has now been rewarded.

UNPARALLELED ANOMALY

Not only those who are involved in the running of these schools but the whole nation should be grateful to the government for its courageous and magnanimous gesture in deciding to settle this problem at last, for the existence of this peculiar brand of school, the non-fee-levying private school, is an unparalleled anomaly in the educational world and a blot on the whole nation.

Changes there must be to bring education in line with social changes that take place in a country or society. Such educational

changes there have been from time to time in the history of this country. If in 1960 it was thought that educational reforms were necessary in respect of the aims, scope and content of education, such changes could have been made, without however abolishing the denominational system which had existed in this country for so long and proved to be a workable system of partnership between the state and religious bodies, the former financing and supervising education, and the latter taking care of the religious dimension in education for which they were doubtless the competent agencies.

The denominational system well suited a country whose traditional culture was dominated by religion and in which the state itself was concerned about the teaching of religion in schools. It was a system that very appropriately took on the character of a modified projection into modern times of the traditional system of *pirivena* and *pansala* education in which pride of place was given to religion.

The abolition of this system by the schools' takeover laws of 1960 and 1961 passed by the SLFP government of that time was certainly not warranted by the educational changes envisaged. There were no doubt defects in the denominational system, but these could have been rectified without total abolition of it. In the light of the circumstances that led to the takeover of schools it can hardly be doubted that it was a vindictive and retaliatory measure aimed at an institution that was thought to be loyally pro-UNP. Apart from

The denominational system well suited a country whose traditional culture was dominated by religion and in which the state itself was concerned about the teaching of religion in schools.

Apart from annihilation of the denominational system, the SLFP government created also the educational monstrosity we know as the non-fee-levying private school.

The ultimate aim of the 1960 government seems to have been the death of the non-fee-levying schools, not by gallows, gun-shot or guillotine, but by slow strangulation, which obviously would be the more painful and punitive.

annihilation of the denominational system, the SLFP government created also the educational monstrosity we know as the non-fee-levying private school.

If in 1960 all schools had been nationalized, as governments in some countries have done, it would have been quite another matter. But the SLFP government did not do that. It permitted schools that had become private and fee-levying in 1951 to continue as they were. And it gave Assisted Schools of Grades I and II the option to go private. Thus the government of 1960 legally accepted the position that the private school had a place in the educational setup of the country.

CLIPPING THE WINGS

A school has to be financed either by the state or by the parents or by both. That is how it is anywhere in the world. But the government of 1960 created a school which was neither financed by the state nor permitted by law to levy fees. How then were such schools to exist? These therefore were schools permitted to exist, but without the means of existence. It is like clipping the wings of a bird and asking it to fly. Therein you see the malice, the viciousness and the cynicism of the education laws of the 1960 SLFP government.

Even the right of opting to become private and fee-levying which these schools had been given by the Education (Amendment) Act, No. 5 of 1951, and which right they exercised in October 1960 was unjustly nullified by retroactive legislation in November of the same year.

By these iniquitous laws, venerable educational institutions which had served the nation for several decades, some for over a century, were overnight reduced to the embarrassing, humiliating and helpless position of being beggar schools, for, being denied both state aid and the right to levy fees, the only means of support left to them was the uncertain almsbowl. They had to live on alms, euphemistically called donations.

The ultimate aim of the 1960 government seems to have been the death of the non-fee-levying schools, not by gallows, gun-shot or guillotine, but by slow strangulation, which obviously would be the more painful and punitive. In fact, several of the schools that originally opted to be private and non-fee-levying had in course of time to surrender, after a valiant struggle to keep head above water

and in the meantime disbursing enormous sums of money laboriously and painfully collected.

The wrongs done to these schools remained to be righted. But nearly nineteen years passed without that being realized. It was of course futile to have expected the SLFP government which perpetrated the fell deed to be honourable enough to put things right when back in power in 1970. But what has surprised us is that even the UNP, which came into power in 1965, failed to do it. A peep into the past when the UNP was last in power will, I think, help us appreciate all the more the decision of the present UNP government to solve the non-fee-levying schools' problem.

HOPES FRUSTRATED

The UNP which was in the opposition in 1960 vehemently and quite rightly opposed the schools' takeover. That being the attitude of the UNP it was hoped that if it came into power it would take steps to rectify what it denounced when it was in the opposition. Accordingly after it came into power in 1965 representations were made time and again by various bodies, religious as well as educational, seeking redress. I myself as President of the Conference of Headmasters and Headmistresses submitted memoranda and led deputations to the Minister of Education of that time. There was an occasion, too, when a top-level Church deputation, of which I was a member, met the Prime Minister himself on the same subject. But all these efforts brought no results.

During the last UNP regime there were occasions too when the government itself gave us hopes of a possible settlement of the schools' problem, as for instance when in 1966 a new bill for educational reforms was proposed, or when it was rumoured in 1967 that before the Negombo by-election certain assurances respecting relief to these schools had been given to Catholics by the UNP government, or when it was reported in the press in November 1969 that the Prime Minister was going to call a conference of owners of non-fee-levying schools to listen to their grievances. However, no relief came. The UNP government came and went. The hopes we had entertained were shattered, and the schools remained as they were.

I think the UNP government of that time was conscious of the need to solve the problem, but, fearful of political repercussions,

it did not have the guts to face the problem and solve it. In any case, our disappointment was very great.

Those who have clung to these schools for so long at tremendous cost to themselves have done so mainly for two reasons. One is that they discountenance state monopoly of education which they believe is not in the best interests of education even from the purely educational point of view. The other is their belief that a truly religious education can be given only in a school under the care of a religious organization. It was for these principles that for so many years they paid the penalty of being subject to discrimination, of being ignored, of being reduced to beggary, of having to struggle painfully for survival. If the ordeal is now going to end, it would be a good fortune indeed.

While hailing the decision of the government to come to the rescue of non-fee-levying schools and thanking the government for it, we sincerely hope that the decision will be implemented forthwith without further disappointment to them.

NEW ERA FOR PRIVATE SCHOOLS

Article in the 'Daily News', 12 February 1980

ABOUT the middle of last year there were news reports that the government had decided to give aid to non-fee-levying private schools. I then wrote in this paper hailing the government's decision as a "courageous and magnanimous gesture," but added: "We sincerely hope that the decision will be implemented forthwith without further disappointment" to these schools.

If at that stage we had some fear that the government's decision might not be implemented, it was because we had been repeatedly disappointed in the past. Those of us, principals, teachers, parents and past pupils who were involved in the running of non-fee-levying schools had been disappointed so often by former governments that we weren't too sure we wouldn't be disappointed again. Even the last UNP government of 1965-70 had given us hopes of relief, and even made promises of aid, but they were not fulfilled. We can be pardoned therefore if last year's announcements of aid were viewed by us with a certain scepticism.

But today we are in a position to declare that we have not been disappointed by the government. The government's decision has been well and truly implemented and the January salaries of teachers of non-fee-levying schools have been paid. Our disappointment with past governments makes us all the more appreciative of the sincerity, fair-mindedness and courage of the present government.

RIGHTS OF A PRIVATE SCHOOL

A school anywhere in the world has to be either a state institution or a state-aided institution or a private institution. A private institution, like a private hospital, must necessarily have the right to levy fees from those it serves. The Education Acts No. 5 of 1960 and No. 8 of 1961 created a school which neither received state aid nor could charge fees. It was thus an anomaly in the educational world. It was called a 'non-fee-levying private school'

but was legally denied the rights of a private school, for a private school must have the right to levy fees. 'Non-fee-levying private school' is a contradiction in terms.

The schools thus created were neither state-aided nor in fact private. The laws passed in the name of educational reform actually deformed well-established schools that had proved their worth and served the nation well.

These iniquitous laws imposed an intolerable financial burden on the schools. Some, after a valiant effort to carry on, finally succumbed. Others, in spite of the legal fetters that bound them, managed to survive. Thanks to the government, the heavy burdens imposed on them have at last been lifted. Schools which had been left to die a slow death by financial starvation have now been given a new lease of life. Schools, some of them venerable and hoary institutions, which had been abandoned by the state have once

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Schools which had been left to die a slow death by financial starvation have now been given a new lease of life.

Schools, some of them venerable and hoary institutions, which had been abandoned by the state have once again been given recognition and a respectable place in the educational system of the country.

An educational injustice perpetrated by petty-minded politicians has been righted.

A sordid episode in the educational history of Sri Lanka has been brought to a close.

The educational freak called the non-fee-levying private school has at long last been removed from our educational scene.

Not only those who have been given relief but all who value freedom and justice in education will be grateful to the government for solving a problem which past governments had ignored or had not had the courage to resolve.

again been given recognition and a respectable place in the educational system of the country. An educational injustice perpetrated by petty-minded politicians has been righted. A sordid episode in the educational history of Sri Lanka has been brought to a close. The educational freak called the non-fee-levying private school, the creation of the 1960 government, has at long last been removed from our educational scene. For all this we owe no small gratitude to the present government.

Not only those who have been given relief but all who value freedom and justice in education will, I am sure, be grateful to the government for solving a problem which past governments had ignored or had not had the courage to resolve.

OBLIGATIONS OF PARENTS AND SCHOOLS

It is true that the financial assistance given so far by the government is limited to the salaries of the eligible teaching staff. But this means a great load has been taken off the shoulders of proprietors of private schools, since the salary bill of the tutorial staff is by far the biggest item of expenditure in a school. State aid should now considerably ease the parents' burden of supporting the schools. It is to be hoped however that parents will continue to give the schools the financial assistance they need to meet the balance expenditure.

The new situation of state aid to private schools imposes obligations on the state on the one hand, and on the schools on the

Now that proprietors have been relieved of a large part of their financial burden by the state, they have an obligation not only towards parents but also to the state to see that their schools are efficiently run without leaving room for complaints.

Whether there will be scrutiny by the Education Department or not, the proprietors themselves should set up the necessary machinery for the close scrutiny of both the academic work and the finances of these schools.

There is imperative need for the proprietor to have an agent with authority and with time at his disposal to supervise the schools of which he is proprietor.

other. The government has to see that the public funds expended by it are utilized in the best interests of education. All this while, private schools had been left to themselves even by the officials of the Department of Education, presumably toeing the line of past governments which chose to ignore them. A closer scrutiny of private schools by the Department would be very desirable—a move that will be welcomed, I am sure, by the principals of these schools.

When we were schoolchildren, the inspection of the school by a team of inspectors from the Education Department was an annual event. Its purpose was not to test the attainment of pupils but to see if the teachers had carried out their duties satisfactorily. The inspection of private schools in particular has gone by default for a long time. During the ten years I was Rector of St Joseph's College (1961-1971) there wasn't a single school inspection. The circuit inspector came once a year to collect the Annual Returns, but there was no inspection. Was it because private schools were being ignored, or the Department was satisfied that the school was doing good work and therefore an inspection was not necessary? In any case, as a principal I would have been happy if there had been at least an annual inspection.

OBLIGATIONS OF PROPRIETORS

Now that proprietors have been relieved of a large part of their financial burden by the state, they have an obligation not only towards parents but also to the state to see that their schools are efficiently run without leaving room for complaints. Whether there will be scrutiny by the Education Department or not, the proprietors themselves should set up the necessary machinery for the close scrutiny of both the academic work and the finances of these schools. It is the proprietor who receives funds from the state and he has the responsibility to see that the management of the schools is carried out efficiently and without abuses of any kind.

In the Assisted Schools system there was legal provision for the appointment by the Director of Education by Gazette notification of Managers for such schools upon the recommendation of the proprietors. (Education Ordinance, No. 31 of 1939, sec. 31). Such a Manager had authority to effectively supervise the working of schools. With the takeover of schools and the termination of the

Assisted Schools system, the post of Manager too fell into abeyance. Thereafter there was only a 'Correspondent' for communication with the Education Department and the Ministry of Education on behalf of the proprietor—although the old label of 'Manager' still clung to the Correspondent.

In the new setup there is imperative need for the proprietor to have an agent with authority and with time at his disposal to supervise the schools of which he is proprietor. Such an authority is necessary to coordinate the working of schools, to inspect and scrutinize their work, to look into complaints of parents, teachers, other employees and even of the Education Department, to promote educational efficiency and eliminate causes of complaints. It would be ideal if such an official could have also the backing of the Education Department, as former Managers had.

RESTORATION OF A TRADITION

The year 1980 opens a new era in private-school education in Sri Lanka. In which direction it will further develop we do not know. In any case, we should bear in mind that private-school education is by no means new or alien to this country. It is rather part and parcel of our traditional culture. It has a tradition extending to over two millenia. Our *pansala* and *pirivena* schools have all along been private institutions, supported by the public and the state. The denominational school system of the British period was but a continuation of the traditional system of private schools in which religion predominated.

It can hardly be doubted that it was politically inspired vindictiveness that led to the fell blow which broke the private-school tradition on 1st December 1960. Two decades have passed since then, and we have had to await the magnanimity of a statesman to restore the tradition.



GRATITUDE TO GOVERNMENT

Address given by the author at the presentation to him of a Felicitation Volume by the Hon. R. Premadasa, Prime Minister, as Chief Guest, on 29 February 1984.

Daily News: 2 March 1984

I AM very happy indeed that so distinguished a person as the Prime Minister is the chief guest at this function. As a past student and past Rector of St Joseph's, I am glad that the first Josephian Prime Minister of Sri Lanka is the one who has at this function made the presentation to me of a Felicitation Volume. I offer him my sincere thanks. I thank him also for the tribute he has paid to me.

But I think I have to thank him for much more than for his kind gesture in coming here today to grace this occasion. As a former Rector of St Joseph's at a time when private schools were harshly treated by the SLFP government of the time, I represent a category of private-school principals who went through very difficult times. Unfortunately most of us are not there today at our former posts to enjoy the benefits conferred on private schools by the present UNP government. All the same, let me offer thanks to the government, through the Prime Minister who is present here, for what the government has done for private schools.

A DARK AGE

I became Rector of St Joseph's at a time which could be described as the worst in its history and the history of private-school education in Sri Lanka. On 1st December 1960 the SLFP government of the day took over all Grade III schools with their buildings and lands. There were more than 600 Catholic schools of that category—the parish schools. Schools of Grades II and I were given the option to go private, but they were not to receive any state aid and, what is worse, they were forbidden by law to charge any

fees. It was like asking a private hospital to look after patients without charging any fees from them. In any democratic society, schools which get no financial help from the state have the liberty to charge fees from parents, but this was denied to private schools like St Joseph's by the education acts No. 5 of 1960 and No. 8 of 1961. When both the sources of financial aid were cut off—namely, state aid and parental aid—it was an almost impossible task to run these schools. In fact, many of them, after struggling along for some time, were handed over to the state. Obviously, what the government of the time intended was exactly that—to create a situation that would force these schools to surrender. There were political motives behind this move, although lame educational excuses were given for it.

Cutting off financial aid, from either source, was not the only disability imposed on private schools, although it was the major blow. Cadeting in these schools was suppressed. Special posts were abolished. Teachers appointed after 1st December 1960 were denied pension rights. A pensionable teacher transferred from one school to another became non-pensionable thereafter. Pupils of other faiths could not be admitted to these schools without the express permission of the Director of Education. Departmental circulars, schemes of work, etc were not sent to these schools. In short, the former state-aided schools became state-abandoned schools, or more correctly, state-harassed schools. We lived and worked under the constant threat of government takeover. A

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It was only the UNP government of President J. R. Jayewardene and Prime Minister R. Premadasa that finally solved the problem by deciding to pay the salaries of teachers of private schools.

State-abandoned schools have become state-aided schools again. They are now recognized, respected and honoured by the state once more.

school could be taken over if even a donation from a parent could be construed to be a fee. A sister school was nearly taken over on such a charge. In that situation it was a painful experience for a principal to find the necessary funds to keep a school going. I went through the ordeal for ten long years here at St Joseph's.

There was a change of government in 1965. The UNP came back to power. But there was very little done by that government to put things right. As a member of the committee of the Headmasters' Conference, and several times as its president, I went with others on deputations to meet the Minister of Education of the time, Mr Iriyagolle, and even the Prime Minister, Mr Dudley Senanayake, but nothing very much happened. The government was of course friendly to private schools, and a little relief was given, such as restoring special posts, but the major problem, the financial problem, remained unsolved. The government lacked the courage to take the bold step of restoring state aid to private schools, or giving them the right to levy fees.

MAGNANIMOUS DECISION

It was only the UNP government of President J. R. Jayewardene and Prime Minister R. Premadasa that finally solved the problem by deciding to pay the salaries of teachers of private schools, which decision was implemented from January 1980. Soon after, I wrote in the press thanking the government. But now, in your presence, Sir, let me publicly say, on behalf of private-school education in Sri Lanka, how much we appreciate the bold and magnanimous decision your government took to give relief to private schools. State-abandoned schools have become state-aided schools again. Private schools have been restored to their rightful place in the educational setup of this country. They are now recognized, respected and honoured by the state once more. They have been given the opportunity to contribute their share to education in Sri Lanka with their characteristic dedication and efficiency. For all that, we are thankful to your government.

I would like to think that in coming here today, you are honouring not only me, but also other principals like me, and their staff, who valiantly kept private-school education going during the dark days of nearly twenty years, until your government came to their rescue. Perhaps new principals and new teachers of private schools do not appreciate enough the blessings they now enjoy, as compared with what we had to go through.

PART II
ESSAYS ON EDUCATION
IN GENERAL

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IN GENERAL

SPARE THE ROD?

Article in the 'Daily News', 26 March 1960

THERE is the ancient and oft-quoted adage "Spare the rod and spoil the child." Some modern educationists regard it with horror. They are mostly the advocates of the total abolition of punishment. In the opposite camp are those who—taking the maxim almost literally—lay too much stress on punishment. One is safe, I think, in keeping clear of these two extreme positions.

It is true that our ancestors did not have the scientific knowledge we possess in regard to this question. But they did have plenty of common sense and practical experience. It would be unwise to condemn wholesale the principle enunciated by this maxim. There cannot be many, I presume, who would not wish to admit that punishment can be salutary. It is not so much the principle as the manner in which it has been followed in practice that has brought upon it the vehement denunciations of some educationists. Today, admittedly, it has to be understood and interpreted in the light of modern developments in educational science, especially in the field of psychology.

REMEDIAL NOT RETRIBUTIVE OR DETERRENT

Granted that punishment, not necessarily corporal, has its place in the education of the young, it needs to be stressed that one should have recourse to it only when other measures, less odious and disagreeable, have failed. It must be emphasized, too, that punishment should be regarded more as remedial than retributive or deterrent, for the primary purpose of punishment is not to make the pupil pay for the fault he has committed, but to correct him and set him on the right path. On no account should a pupil be punished in a revengeful spirit, nor for any sadistic satisfaction that may arise even subconsciously from subjecting another to pain. The pupil himself should be made to feel that he is being punished by one who is intensely interested in his welfare and desirous of doing him good.

This cannot be done if the punishment is administered by one who is flustered with anger and impatience. There is every likelihood that in such a situation the teacher will act rashly and unjustly. It is very important, above all, that the punishment should be just. A pupil may not find it difficult to be reconciled to a punishment which he knows he deserves, but unjust punishment will nearly always engender resentment and bitterness. We know of educators who did not 'spare the rod' but were nonetheless loved and revered by their pupils, because they knew how to punish. Much depends, therefore, on the way in which punishment is administered.

I was told by an educationist I met abroad of a poignant incident which I should like to mention here as an example of rash and hasty action on the part of the teacher. The teacher had noticed a new boy in the class and questioned him. The boy stood up with one hand in his pocket. The teacher flew into a rage and summoned the boy to his desk. The boy came up but still had the hand in his pocket. "I'll teach you manners!" the teacher yelled and gave him a blow. Then only the boy pulled his hand out of his pocket. And the teacher saw, to his utter confusion, that what the boy had put in his pocket was not the hand but the end of the coat sleeve which covered the part of the hand that had been amputated.

Punishment should be regarded more as remedial than retributive or deterrent, for the primary purpose of punishment is not to make the pupil pay for the fault he has committed, but to correct him and set him on the right path.

The pupil should be made to feel that he is being punished by one who is intensely interested in his welfare and desirous of doing him good.

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Harshness on the part of the teacher in the case of backward pupils will only lead to discouragement and frustration.

In education we are called upon to deal with something of the highest order in nature, something extremely intricate and complex, something very delicate and profound—the human personality.

Educational science has made such progress in modern times and is so important a subject that one who wants to be a teacher cannot any longer be unequipped with it.

A teacher who fails to be an example and inspiration to his pupils is not likely to succeed in administering punishment effectively.

FACTORS TO BE TAKEN NOTE OF

In administering punishment there are so many factors that have to be taken into consideration. There is, for example, the age factor. Older pupils cannot be treated in the same way as the younger ones. Whether a pupil should be punished at all, or what punishment should be given, is a matter that should be considered in the light of the pupil's age and maturity.

Then there is the question of the pupil's temperament and emotional makeup. A punishment productive of good results in one pupil may not act in the same way on another, or may even produce adverse effects, simply because of a difference of temperament. For example, a child of a nervous and sensitive nature will feel a punishment far more intensely than one of a phlegmatic temperament. The physical conditions of the child, such as the state of his health, have also to be taken note of.

Another important factor that must be carefully noted, but is often overlooked, is the student's capacity, the level of his intelligence. No good will come from punishing a student who fails to do well in studies, or does not do well in a particular subject, if the reason for the failure is that he has no capacity for such study. Harshness on the part of the teacher in the case of backward pupils will only lead to discouragement and frustration.

There are also various factors external to the pupil which may have a bearing on his actions. Educators know that a child is very much influenced by his environment. Disorderly conduct on the part of a pupil may not be entirely due to his fault: it may be that there are other factors that have directly or indirectly influenced

his actions. In such a case the pupil alone cannot be held responsible.

It will be seen, then, that the question of punishment is not so simple as it looks. As we have noted, there are so many factors both internal and external to the pupil which have to be taken into account. It follows from this that the teacher must know his pupils well. This is a fundamental factor in the education of a child. The teacher should, in the first place, have a deep knowledge and understanding of child nature in general. Then he should have also a knowledge of the individual child—of his character, temperament, ability, aptitudes, condition of health, etc. Still it would not be sufficient. He must also have a knowledge of the various external factors to whose influence the child may be subject. Without such knowledge on the part of the teacher, punishment, even where it can be beneficial, cannot be expected to produce good results.

But here we are faced with a serious problem. Our schools today are pitifully overcrowded. Teachers are burdened with far bigger numbers of pupils than the quota they could reasonably cope with. That being so, we cannot expect a teacher to know his pupils in the way and to the extent he should know them. It is to be regretted that in such circumstances a child will not receive the education he really should have.

TRAINING OF TEACHER IMPERATIVE

Another problem is that too many of our teachers are really not qualified to teach. On the one hand, because of the acute shortage of teachers, persons who have had no professional training in education are being appointed as teachers. On the other, too many take to teaching as just a means of livelihood. It must be emphasized that mere possession of knowledge of the various sciences does not make one a teacher. One may have knowledge and not know how to impart it to others. Furthermore, education does not consist in merely imparting knowledge, even if one is capable of doing it.

In addition to the knowledge of the various subjects, the teacher must have also a knowledge of the science of education; further, he must have a training as a teacher. This is where the graduate teacher who is not trained is badly handicapped.

What would anyone think of a doctor who attempts to practise his profession without the requisite knowledge and training? In

education we are called upon to deal with something of the highest order in nature, something extremely intricate and complex, something very delicate and profound—the human personality. We should not expect anyone to undertake teaching without an adequate knowledge of the science of pedagogy and without proper training. Educational science has made such progress in modern times and is so important a subject that one who wants to be a teacher cannot any longer be unequipped with it. It is essential that one should have at least a basic knowledge of the subject.

There is another important point to be noted. A teacher who fails to be an example and inspiration to his pupils is not likely to succeed in administering punishment effectively. Children are by nature hero-worshippers. Allied to this is an innate urge in them to imitate—to imitate their elders in particular. The teacher by reason of his superior position in relation to the pupil and his superior knowledge and wide experience, naturally becomes an object of hero-worship to the pupil. This attitude of the pupil places the teacher in a position where he could effectively influence him.

It is imperative therefore that the teacher should set before his pupils, from his own example, the highest standards of discipline and moral rectitude. If, on the contrary, the teacher falls short of the expectations of his pupils, if he does not manifest in his life and conduct the high standards he demands of them, if his failings and weaknesses are such as could be noticed by them, it is not likely that he will be able to command their respect, and consequently any attempt on his part to correct them by means of punishment is bound to be ineffectual. It is the duty of the teacher therefore so to conduct himself as to be a source of edification and inspiration to his pupils.

PRIVATE TUITION—BOON OR BANE?

Article in the 'Daily News', 22 January 1972

WHEN I was a schoolboy, very few of my schoolmates, and hardly any of my classmates, had private tuition. Personally, I had no private tuition at all throughout my entire school career. Those of my generation will agree with me that in our boyhood private tuition was something rare. The education we received in school was such that in the case of most of us there was no need for private tuition. But today the situation is very different.

Coaching by private tutors, in addition to instruction in school, is a widespread practice today, especially among pupils of the bigger urban schools. There are many pupils who take tuition in several subjects, several times a week, some almost daily. Parents have to spend quite a lot of money on tuition, the amount they spend being often several times more than the fees they pay the school, in the case of fee-levying schools. Correspondingly, teachers earn an extra income by their tuition, some of them earning even more than the salary they get from the school.

AN ABNORMAL SITUATION

I can quite understand extra tuition being given to a pupil who is weak in a particular subject, till he comes up to the required standard, or to a pupil who has been absent from school for a long time, till he catches up what he had missed. But today private tuition is so common that it certainly is an abnormal situation in the local educational setup. For, apart from the problem of parents having to spend so much money on tuition to educate their children in spite of free education, there is also the fact that this is a practice that is educationally unsound. Educationists and others who have at heart the welfare of the children cannot but be concerned about this unhealthy situation.

There are various causes that have brought about this situation and various categories of people are to blame for it—the government, parents, teachers and the pupils themselves.

Today private tuition is so common that it certainly is an abnormal situation in the local educational setup.

Classes, especially in the urban schools, have grown so big that it is practically impossible for the teacher to give the weaker pupils the assistance they need, with the result that they have to seek such assistance outside the school.

A teacher's work for his pupils cannot be confined to the classroom. Not only the pupil, but the teacher also has to do 'home-work.'

Free education becomes a farce when the education provided in schools is of such poor quality that parents have to get their children educated by private tutors.

A pupil of normal intelligence who is attentive in class and studies his lessons with regularity should find the tuition he gets in the classroom quite sufficient, so that there would be no need for him to have extra tuition outside school, unless the teacher is inefficient or fails in his duties. However, in a class there would be weaker pupils who might need extra attention. Normally such attention should come from the teacher himself. But the trouble is that classes, especially in the urban schools, have grown so big that it is practically impossible for the teacher to give the weaker pupils the assistance they need, with the result that they have to seek such assistance outside the school.

When I sat the Cambridge Junior examination, from a provincial school, there were only fourteen pupils in my class, and all fourteen of us passed. Our number being so small, the teachers were able to give us individual attention, especially in the case of the weaker pupils, so that there was no need for anyone of us to get private tuition.

But today the teacher cannot be expected to give so much attention to each pupil when he has to teach a class of forty or fifty pupils. In Ceylon we still do not have modern educational equipment and other facilities to handle large classes effectively. Marking exercises, or going through the individual written work of pupils, becomes a problem when the class is too big, with the result that pupils, especially the weaker ones, receive little or hardly any

Private tuition has even assumed a certain dignity and snobbishness and become almost a status symbol—reminiscent of the practice of royal and aristocratic families to have their children educated by private tutors.

A parent's desire to see his or her child do well in life is understandable, but parents must also be prepared not to expect of their children what they are not capable of achieving.

A weak but intelligent pupil will doubtless improve with tuition, but no amount of tuition will impart intelligence to a pupil who does not have it.

individual attention in school, so that they have to seek outside the school the assistance they need.

A teacher's work for his pupils cannot be confined to the classroom. Not only the pupil, but the teacher also has to do 'home-work'. He has to prepare his lessons before coming to school, and go through the exercises of his pupils after school. But the work of many teachers today is limited to the classroom. As the number of pupils is big, and as so many teachers are busy with their private tuition, they show great reluctance to do 'home-work' for their pupils.

SUPPLEMENTARY INCOME

Understandably, many teachers show great avidity for private tuition. I knew of a teacher who just before the last period of the day parked his car close to his classroom so that as soon as school was over, and sometimes a little before, he could rush out for his tuition before other vehicles coming into the premises blocked his

It is most unfortunate that in this country a situation has developed requiring pupils attending schools to depend so much on private tuition.

The big demand for private tuition is a poor reflection on the country's educational system.

way and delayed his exit. If the salary paid to teachers is inadequate, you cannot really blame them for being so eager to supplement their income by this means. It is to be regretted, however, that there are teachers who go to the extent of trying to attract pupils into their tuition classes by questionable means. Some teachers are so engrossed in their private tuition that they neglect their school work. However sympathetic one would like to be to the teacher, one cannot condone such conduct.

Parents in their concern to give a good education to their children have no alternative but to turn to private tutors when their children do not receive in school the education they should. But how many parents can afford the expense involved in engaging the services of a tutor? It is by making great sacrifices that some parents meet this extra expense. Free education is obviously not free in their case. But what about the parents who really cannot afford private tuition? Their children have to go without it. Of what use is free education to them? Free education becomes a farce when the education provided in schools is of such poor quality that parents have to get their children educated by private tutors.

Moreover, free education was intended to provide educational opportunity to all. But equal opportunity seems to be no more than a myth. Children of well-to-do parents enjoy the benefits of private tuition, while the others have to be content with the education provided in schools, however shoddy it may be.

In fact, private tuition has even assumed a certain dignity and snobbishness and become almost a status symbol—reminiscent of the practice of royal and aristocratic families to have their children educated by private tutors. Giving private tuition to one's children has come to be regarded in certain circles as a mark of social superiority and something to be proud of.

A parent's desire to see his or her child do well in life is understandable, but parents must also be prepared not to expect of their children what they are not capable of achieving. All children are not equally gifted. A pupil without talent for academic studies might do well in the field of practical education. Parents and teachers have to take cognizance of the natural gifts and aptitudes children possess and educate them accordingly.

How often parents have told me, "We will give him tuition," when I told them that their child had no aptitude for the course of studies they wished him to pursue. Many parents do spend large

sums of money in giving tuition to children who cannot profit by it. In spite of all the tuition, they remain where they were. A weak but intelligent pupil will doubtless improve with tuition, but no amount of tuition will impart intelligence to a pupil who does not have it.

STRAIN ON THE PUPIL

It happens, too, that pupils, especially the not so intelligent ones, who get tuition at home, become a problem in the school. As they have to spend several hours with the tutor after school, and in the belief that the tutor will somehow impart all the knowledge to them, they tend to relax in school. They become a disturbance in the class and a source of annoyance to their teachers and classmates. Even otherwise, frequent tuition, in addition to school work, can be a strain on the pupil, with ill effects.

Whatever the chances a pupil may have of profiting by tuition, tutors, understandably, are always hopeful and optimistic. They tend to exaggerate, on the one hand, the poor quality of teaching in the school and, on the other, their ability to work wonders by private tuition. Parents, ever hopeful and in the belief that their children are capable of making the grade, blame the school and turn to the tutor expecting him to deliver the goods. But it often happens that in the end they are disillusioned and have to make other and less ambitious plans for the future of their children.

The demand for private tuition reaches a climax at the GCE A/L stage. This is because the A/L examination is the door to the university, and gaining admission to the university has become highly competitive, especially in the case of the Engineering and Medical faculties. It may be that not all schools have efficient teachers and laboratory and library facilities to cater for A/L pupils although they may have A/L classes, with the result that pupils have to turn to private tutors for help. But it is also a fact that even fairly gifted pupils in the big schools fail to do well at the A/L examination, but succeed later after instruction by private tutors or in tutorials. This is especially the case of pupils who get involved in sports activities, which have proliferated in the big schools in recent years. It is rarely that in the present circumstances a student excels in both studies and sports. But there is also the belief that excellence in sports, too, is a passport for employment. In the tutorials, however, where there is hardly any sports activity, students

settle down to their studies, and make up for what they had lost in school.

It is most unfortunate that in this country a situation has developed requiring pupils attending schools to depend so much on private tuition. This, as we have seen, is a complex problem, and many factors have contributed to it. Many years of tinkering with education by successive governments, political interference in education, the frequent transfer of teachers and principals, shortage of school accommodation and of well-trained and dedicated teachers, lack of diversification of education—all these have contributed to a decline in educational standards. And, in a country where unemployment among the educated has reached alarming proportions, and consequently there is very keen competition for jobs, parents and children have learnt to turn hopefully to the private tutor expecting him to be their saviour. The big demand for private tuition is a poor reflection on the country's educational system. The children, inevitably, are its unfortunate victims.

POSTSCRIPT TO RAGGING

Article in the 'Daily News', 21 February 1972

AT the beginning of the year, when our institutions of higher education opened their portals to new entrants, several instances of ragging, some of them carried to barbaric excesses, were reported in the press. We were told of a public ragging session at Polgahawela railway station which was described by onlookers as "nothing short of the scandalous" and "really shocking." Another report had it that an ENT specialist had saved the life of a victim of ragging who had got some foreign matter into his lungs and could have been choked to death. It was reported also that a female student of a technical institute was subjected to a harrowing ordeal. For alleged ragging, four medical students were suspended, said another report.

These are some of the ragging incidents to which public attention was drawn as a result of their being published in the press. But there have been other instances of ragging, of various types and varying degrees of viciousness, which escaped public notice. Year after year, at the commencement of the new academic year in our higher educational institutions, reports of such incidents have appeared in the press. On such occasions, the attention of the public is focussed on them, but we soon forget about them till they crop up again the following year.

AN UNCANNY ART

Admittedly, ragging is a practice imported into this country from the West along with other things good and bad. But in Ceylon it has proliferated and developed new characteristics of its own, not the least of which is its sadistic quality. The ingenuity of our youth has turned ragging into an uncanny art.

What do we gain by ragging? James S. Ross, speaking of the "group-mind" in his *Groundwork of Educational Psychology* has this to say of ragging: "Group feeling runs high when the school as a whole competes in any way with another school. In college the

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Fun must be such that the one at the receiving end should also be able to join in it and enjoy it. The moment we begin to cause pain and embarrassment, it ceases to be fun.

To seek satisfaction or pleasure in causing pain to others is sadism.

Wantonly giving pain even to an animal is contrary to the spirit of Buddhism.

Ragging in the way it is indulged in should not have thrived in the Buddhist climate of this country.

'ragging' of one 'year' by another seems to promote a 'year' spirit which lasts for a lifetime; indeed, the favourite defence of organized 'ragging' is just that it does promote such a spirit." (p. 260). Even if it were so, aren't there other gentler ways of cultivating the group feeling or sense of solidarity?

Generally, ragging is resorted to by the older students to have some fun at the expense of the raw, submissive freshers. Fun is good, so long as it remains fun. But the problem in the case of ragging has always been to know where to draw the line. Fun must be such that the one at the receiving end should also be able to join in it and enjoy it. The moment we begin to cause pain and embarrassment, it ceases to be fun. To seek satisfaction or pleasure in causing pain to others is sadism.

Was there ragging in our educational institutions of old, the pirivena seats of learning?

It is strange how we who clamoured and agitated so much for political independence, now so slavishly submit ourselves to cultural inroads from the West.

How eagerly, especially our youth, pick up the latest from the West, however flippant, as if they believe that what comes from the West is the best.

This is a country where *mettā* (universal love) and *karuṇā* (compassion for all sentient beings) are cardinal tenets of the majority religion. Wantonly giving pain even to an animal is contrary to the spirit of Buddhism. Ragging in the way it is indulged in should not have thrived in the Buddhist climate of this country. It is a practice quite contrary to our traditions. Was there ragging in our educational institutions of old, the *pirivena* seats of learning? Was there ragging in the ancient Indian Buddhist universities of Nālandā, Valabhī and Vikramaśīlā, which were in existence centuries before their European counterparts—Paris, Oxford, Bologna—came into being?

We must no doubt be thankful for the advanced knowledge of science and technology we have received from the West, but need we also follow the West in the cultural sphere? It is strange how we who clamoured and agitated so much for political independence, now so slavishly submit ourselves to cultural inroads from the West. How eagerly, especially our youth, pick up the latest from the West, however flippant, as if they believe that what comes from the West is the best. Do we not have our own cultural, moral and spiritual values we should prize and be proud of?

SOMETHING BETTER

Couldn't we do something better than ragging when new entrants to universities join the ranks of the old? Orientals in general and Ceylonese in particular are known for their hospitality. Couldn't the older students, instead of ragging and causing annoyance, humiliation, embarrassment, pain of mind, and even physical harm to freshmen, extend to them their kindness, friendliness and hospitality? Instead of flaying and fleecing the freshers, wouldn't it be better for the senior students of each faculty to organize a reception to welcome them and make them feel happy and at home among them? A corporate gesture of this nature on the part of the senior students would admittedly be far better than ragging of even the refined brand to promote the group spirit James Ross speaks of.

Seniors usually give the excuse that they were ragged when they came in, and so now it's their turn to rag the new-comers. But couldn't we break this chain somewhere and introduce something better instead? It was comforting to read in the newspapers that attempts in this direction are being made. Those who were responsible for them deserve the highest commendation from the

public. All praise to the students' union which arranged to meet and greet the freshers at the railway station and transport their belongings to their respective halls of residence; to the teachers' association of a faculty which held a function to welcome the new entrants and served them *kiribath*; to the members of the Buddhist Brotherhood who accorded a "warm welcome" to the freshers; to any others—there surely must have been others—who similarly welcomed the new-comers in a friendly way, instead of ragging, though their kind deeds, not being reported in the press, did not reach the notice of the public.

May we earnestly hope that the noble example set by them will be emulated by others, and that ragging will eventually be stamped out and replaced by practices more in keeping with the spirit of our culture and traditions.

PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION

Article in the 'Daily News', 28 September 1977

FOR what purpose was the school admission age raised in 1972 from five to six? For whose benefit was the change made?

Was it a measure to save government coffers by keeping the five-year-olds out of school? This is 'population control' extended into the school world. Fewer men on our planet means less consumption of its resources; fewer children in our schools means saving of government funds. When the student population is smaller, you need less accommodation, less furniture and equipment, fewer teachers: hence less funds. Admittedly, you have to cut the coat according to the cloth. If the government is short of funds for education, some way must no doubt be found to reduce expenditure. But would this be the way of doing it?

Or is it thought that the five-year-olds are yet too young to be educated? To say so would be a pedagogical howler, and Madame Montessori, more than anybody else, would turn in her grave. Much younger children, in fact, can be educated. The capacity to be educated is present from a very early age. It is the method of education that has to change according to age. For the sake of convenience, especially from the point of view of teaching method, children are generally grouped into primary and pre-primary or pre-school grades.

THE STATE AND PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION

Compulsory education begins with the primary grades. That does not mean that the state should not be concerned about the pre-school education of children. Just as at the other end the state's involvement in education extends well beyond the compulsory stage into higher education, so should the state be concerned about the pre-school child, not necessarily doing the teaching in state-run schools. In Japan there are kindergarten schools run by the state, by local bodies, and by the private sector, the first being the smallest number, and the last by far the biggest.

But a poor country like Sri Lanka which while struggling continuously to keep head above water has at the same time undertaken to provide free education from the primary school to the university can hardly be expected to provide pre-school education as well. A practical and partial solution of the problem was the admission of the five-year-olds to school, although in most other countries compulsory education begins at the age of six or even later. This arrangement meant that our children, who had no pre-school education facilities, did not have to wait too long to begin their primary-school education. It was a practical measure and, to all appearances, worked satisfactorily.

However, the decision was made in 1972 to raise the school admission age to six. In the context of education in this country this was, to my mind, an unwise step. Such a decision might have been all right if there had been provision for pre-school education, so that at least the five-year-old would not miss education before admission to the primary school. But everybody knows that no such provision has been made in this country, neither by the government nor by local bodies. The few montessori and nursery schools that existed at the time of the decision were run by private institutions or individuals and were confined for the most part to urban areas.

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Just as at the other end the state's involvement in education extends well beyond the compulsory stage into higher education, so should the state be concerned about the pre-school child, not necessarily doing the teaching in state-run schools.

Very specialized training and qualities of character are needed to handle the education of the pre-school child.

It is true that since then pre-primary schools of all sorts have mushroomed. For convenience's sake we shall call them all 'nursery schools'. While on the one hand the number of such schools that exist is totally inadequate to cater for the pre-school child population of this country, on the other, most of them are ill-equipped and conspicuously lacking in trained staff to provide the type of education that is expected of a pre-primary, kindergarten school. The teachers are generally young girls, some without even the GCE O/L qualification, and most of them without any training whatsoever in child education. This in spite of the fact that very specialized training and qualities of character are needed to handle the education of the pre-school child. It has been economical for those who run these schools to employ untrained girls, who have to be satisfied with the poor salaries they are paid, whereas trained teachers would demand higher pay.

Many of the nurseries, lacking equipment and trained personnel, hardly do anything more than mere baby-sitting. But in the present situation even this has proved to be a worthwhile service where the busy mother is concerned. If she is a working mother, she would be happy to have her child looked after at least for a part of her working hours; if she is a housewife, she would find it convenient to have the child out of home, so she would be free to attend to her household chores.

PLANNING FOR PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION

Did the government that decided to keep the five-year-olds out of school plan any provision for pre-school education? Were any guidelines or directives given to nursery schools in regard to accommodation, equipment, staff, and the standards that should be maintained? Were any attempts made to enlist the services of local bodies and the private sector to set up schools for pre-primary education? Was any inquiry ever made to find out what type of education was being given in nursery schools and whether they had only been set up by incompetent persons exploiting the situation to rake in an income without satisfactorily delivering the goods?

In any case, the nursery schools that exist are fee-levying and therefore only the parent who is able to pay fees can have his or her child educated at pre-school level. This situation has created a big problem—the great disparity in educational opportunity in respect of the pre-school child. Whereas the aim should be to provide

equality of educational opportunity, there is absolutely no such equality in pre-primary education. The vast majority of the five-year-olds, not to speak of the younger ones, have no schooling at all, either because of the absence of nursery schools in the locality or—this is the major reason—because the parents cannot afford to pay the fees. This is specially true of rural children.

This disparity becomes noticeable when the child who has been in the nursery school and the child who has not, meet in Grade I when they are six. The former is ahead of the latter in many respects. Not only has the former gained some elementary skills but is also psychologically better prepared for primary-school life, having got used to the school situation—the situation of being out of home, of being handled by teachers, of meeting and mixing with other pupils—and has gained some self-confidence and self-reliance, whereas the child who has not been to school at all is a complete stranger to the school situation, which places him or her in a position of inferiority.

In the circumstances it would be desirable at least for the present to admit children to the primary school when they are five. In the meantime every effort should be made to organize pre-school education in the country. As the government cannot afford to meet the entire cost of such education, it should seek the assistance of local bodies as well as private institutions and individuals. This the government might do by giving a grant to those who are prepared to establish and run pre-primary schools. In the case of schools that will be opened by local bodies, the balance expenditure should come from their own funds, so that children attending such schools will not be required to pay fees, while schools opened by the private sector should be permitted to charge fees to meet their expenses. A department of pre-school education might be established to operate under the Director-General of Education for the purpose of giving directives and guidance to these schools, in addition to registering and supervising them, and also to see to the training of teachers for such schools.

When pre-school education in the country has developed, a stage may be reached when children of five could be grouped with those of three and four in the pre-primary grades, so that admission to the primary school thereafter would be at six.

IMPLICATIONS OF RE-SCRUTINY

Article in the 'Daily News', 10 November 1977

FOR the last so many years the Examinations Department in this country has permitted the re-scrutiny of the results of certain examinations for which a fee has to be paid for each subject. Who introduced this practice, and why was it done? Why is re-scrutiny confined to some examinations only? Is re-scrutiny really necessary? If so, why was a situation that calls for re-scrutiny permitted to arise? Couldn't what gives cause for re-scrutiny be eliminated at least now, so that there would be no need for re-scrutiny anymore? Or is this a practice that has come to stay? It seems to me that re-scrutiny itself needs to be re-scrutinized.

Isn't re-scrutiny, in a sense, a public confession of the inability or failure of the Department of Examinations to deliver the goods? When a candidate sits a public examination conducted by so responsible and authoritative a body as the government Examinations Department, he should be in a position to have enough confidence in the Department to accept the results it gives as final and free from error. But such does not seem to be the case. The Sri Lanka student cannot have that confidence. The fact that re-scrutiny is officially allowed by the Examinations Department and applications for re-scrutiny are entertained by it implies that it admits that its results are not free from error for one reason or another. There is no need to check results by re-scrutiny if they can be accepted as correct.

GENERATES DOUBT

From this it follows that no candidate can be altogether sure of the results he gets. Who is to judge whether the results are correct? Only the candidate knows what his performance has been at the examination. But even he cannot be sure whether the answers he has given are exactly those that were expected, whether he has answered sufficiently and adequately, whether the manner of

presentation of the answers satisfied the examiners, etc. Hence, where normally the candidate would have accepted the results as conclusive and what he really deserved, being the verdict of qualified judges, the offer of re-scrutiny by the Examinations Department generates doubt in his mind.

Hope springs eternal in the human breast. It is particularly so in the case of examination candidates. Teachers and school heads know that students generally expect good results even when they have not performed so well at an examination. The one who has failed in a subject thinks it's a mistake and hopes to get a pass at the re-scrutiny; the one who has passed expects a Credit; the one who has only a Credit thinks he should get a Distinction. The hope of obtaining better results, therefore, makes the candidate apply for re-scrutiny, even when the results given him are those he actually deserved.

Teachers and principals may know what their pupils are capable of. But performance at a public examination does not always correspond to performance at school. Hence, even if the results are not exactly what the teachers had expected, they should normally be taken as correct. But the knowledge of the possibility of error in the results, which has to be checked by re-scrutiny, makes teachers and principals too doubt the accuracy of the results given, even if in fact the results are correct.

PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS

Re-scrutiny, moreover, places the candidate in a state of indecision and perplexity. He does not know what to do next. Hoping there would be, after re-scrutiny, a change in the results, which will

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Isn't re-scrutiny an admission of the presence of error to a greater extent than what is implied by the dictum 'to err is human'?

The candidate who is made to pay a fee for re-scrutiny is in reality being penalized for the shortcomings of the Examinations Department, whereas it is the Department that should be taken to task for giving results one cannot be sure of.

qualify him for a higher course, he will not seriously apply himself to a repetition of the last course. And not being sure of the outcome of the re-scrutiny, he will neither do serious work in the higher course even if he is provisionally placed in it. Thus not much work will be done by the student until the re-scrutiny results are known, which generally take long in coming. You cannot blame a student who is placed in such a doubtful and indecisive frame of mind for being indifferent to his studies.

In fact, psychologically re-scrutiny has a bad effect on the pupil. It not only makes him doubt the accuracy of examination results and thus lose confidence in the Examinations Department, but also gives him false hope, leaves him indecisive which affects his studies, and leads him to frustration. It is actually in the case of a very small number of candidates that changes in the results are made after re-scrutiny. But the problem is how can anyone know without resorting to re-scrutiny whether there will be a change or not? And candidates are always hopeful that there will be a change.

As a school head, I have known candidates who have applied for re-scrutiny in all the eight subjects of the GCE O/L and all the four subjects of the A/L. You cannot blame them. If there can be error in the results of some candidates and some subjects, there can be error also in the results of other candidates and other subjects.

This leads us to another question. What about the candidates who cannot afford the fees for re-scrutiny? Have they to be content with the results given them, in spite of the possibility of error, and forgo the chance of bettering the results?

A candidate who sits a public examination is entitled to be given error-free results once and for all. Would it therefore be fair by a candidate, whether he can afford the fees or not, to make him pay extra to check his results because of the liability of error in the performance of the Examinations Department?

Why is there need for re-scrutiny?

To err is human, it is true. But this applies to all human actions, not merely to the marking of answer scripts, totalling of marks, and entry of marks in the results sheets. Every effort should no doubt be made to eliminate error, but still, all told, there will always be room for error in human actions and decisions. This is necessarily part of human life.

If re-scrutiny is allowed, it is certainly not because of the general possibility of error in human actions. Were it so, re-scrutiny should be allowed for every examination in this country and in all other countries. Isn't re-scrutiny, then, an admission of the presence of error to a greater extent than what is implied by the dictum 'to err is human'?

CANDIDATES PENALIZED

If re-scrutiny is allowed for avoidable errors, isn't this something that should not be tolerated at all, and should be rectified forthwith? It is no credit to the Department of Examinations, nor to the government whose creature it is, if it is an organization that cannot rise to a level of efficiency that would win for it the confidence of candidates. For, the purpose of the Department is to hold examinations and give results which candidates can accept with confidence—without having to resort to re-scrutiny, paying a fee, to check the accuracy of the results. The candidate who is made to pay a fee for re-scrutiny is in reality being penalized for the shortcomings of the Examinations Department, whereas it is the Department that should be taken to task for giving results one cannot be sure of.

Why is re-scrutiny allowed in some examinations and not in others? It seems to be that it is in the case of examinations for which large numbers of candidates sit that re-scrutiny is entertained by the Department. This appears to be the crux of the problem. Is this an admission, then, that the liability of error is greater when the number of candidates is bigger? Even if it is so, is re-scrutiny the remedy? The remedy really would be to improve the efficiency

and fortify the machinery of the Department for the conducting of the examinations in question so that the margin of error would not be wider merely because of the numbers. Other examining bodies, such as the External Examinations Department of the University of London, and the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate, which have to cope with very large numbers of students, have been able to conduct their examinations with efficiency and without leaving room for the need of re-scrutiny.

The Ministry of Education would do well to look into the question of re-scrutiny to see if it could not be done away with. But before it is discontinued, the Examinations Department will obviously have to make itself so efficient as to give assurance to candidates and their parents and teachers and the public that the results it gives are free from error—barring of course the errors that go with human frailty.

EDUCATION AND POLITICS

Article in the 'Daily Mirror', 27 January 1978

IS it not a regrettable fact, to which parents and teachers could well testify, that for quite a long time the child in this country has been the unfortunate victim of political dominance in education? Ill-considered and all too hasty policy changes made by one Education Minister after another in respect of such matters as school admission age, curricula of studies, public examinations and university admission have caused problems for the pupil. Too often changes have been made without consultation with those who are closest to and most concerned about the child—parents, teachers and educationists. It often happens that it is after decisions have already been made that parents and educators come to know of them from newspaper reports. Educational bureaucrats, however knowledgeable they may be, and political party supporters, however indebted the politician may be to them, are not the best persons to formulate educational policy. Bureaucrats should rather be the executors of policy than its formulators.

POLITICAL INTERFERENCE

In my presidential address at the Annual General Meeting of the Sri Lanka Conference of Headmasters and Headmistresses held on 28 September 1968 I spoke on the subject of political interference in education. The observations I made on that occasion were given wide publicity in the press. (See e.g. *Daily Mirror*, 30 Sept. 1968).

Almost ten years have passed since then, but the situation has hardly changed. The complaints I made then have, I think, to be repeated with equal or greater force in view of what has been going on during the past decade. To quote from the address referred to:

“For us educators and educationists, it is a matter for deep regret that politics has long been the bane of education in this country. It must be confessed, even at the risk of rousing the wrath and incurring the displeasure of the powers that be, that

meddling and muddling by politicians, and the tinkering with education by one Education Minister after another, are largely to blame for our educational ills. With scant regard for the views of educators, politicians have all too often had their own way, with unfortunate results. Worse still, educators have been reduced to a position of subservience and impotence, so that they are unable even to freely speak out their minds. The prime concern of the politician being, as a rule, to keep his seat in parliament somehow, all other matters have to be subordinate to that. It often happens that the politician's course of action is influenced, not by considerations in the best interests of education, but by the prospect of securing support for himself to remain in power."

I do not mean to belittle the politician's role in education. He certainly has an important contribution to make, but the part he has to play in education in a democratic society should be one of subsidiarity and service, not dominance. His task is to help the parent and teacher educate the child, with due regard for their respective rights, roles and responsibilities. Hence it is of prime importance that parents and teachers should have the freedom and opportunity to express their views, that consideration should be

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The part the politician has to play in education in a democratic society should be one of subsidiarity and service, not dominance.

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given to their views, and that there should be continued consultation with them, especially in regard to major educational changes.

POLITICAL STANCE IN POLICY

The parent loves his or her child and is concerned about its welfare and future; the teacher is professionally committed to education and responsible for the child's educational progress; the politician, however, having no natural or professional attachment to the child, is inclined, as experience has shown us, to look beyond education to his own political interests.

Nothing can be so disastrous to school discipline as for the principal to be rendered impotent owing to outside pressures.

There are also principals who, being under the protective wing of politicians, will not scruple to take liberties to the detriment of the school.

Were not such educational changes made in recent times as those involving free education, change over to *svabhāṣā*, university reform, and takeover of schools largely influenced by political rather than educational considerations? These changes may have for the nonce provided the politician with catchy slogans, but were they, in the long run, in the best interests of education in the country? Not that such changes should not have been made. They were indeed desirable changes, but not in the way they were made. Had the changes been motivated by purely educational considerations, they would have been made differently, in a way that would have been far more beneficial to the country at large. In fact, the saner proposals made by educationists, when such changes were mooted, were disregarded by the powers that were. Maybe they were proposals politically unattractive, however sound they were educationally.

It is no secret that there has been political favouritism or victimization, as the case may be, in respect of appointments to the educational service as well as transfers and promotions. Another disease is political interference in the running of schools—in the admission of pupils, for instance, or disciplinary action against

pupils and errant teachers. Nothing can be so disastrous to school discipline as for the principal to be rendered impotent owing to outside pressures. What I said ten years ago on this subject is, regrettably, still relevant. To quote again from the same address:

“To come down to the local scene, there are the local politicians who interfere in school matters, to the detriment of education. Mr Dick, M.P. wants the children of his supporters to be somehow admitted to the school, whatever may become of the other applicants; Mr Tom, M.P. will get teachers who support him appointed to the staff, whether according to their qualifications they fit into the staff or not; Mr Harry, M.P. will want his supporter’s son, dismissed from school for indiscipline, taken back into the school; the principal has to be tolerant of even recalcitrant members of the staff, if they happen to be the friends and supporters of politicians, lest he get into trouble with the politicians, with dire consequences.”

It is difficult to maintain discipline in a school where there is interference of this nature. On the other hand, there are also principals who, being under the protective wing of politicians, will not scruple to take liberties to the detriment of the school. School discipline has suffered considerably in recent years. It was not so long ago that hordes of mere schoolchildren were out in the streets during school hours obstructing traffic, causing inconvenience to commuters, etc., in connection with an incident in the university.

Lack of stability and continuity in educational policy and in planning and implementation has notably been the bane of education in Sri Lanka in recent times. Each government that comes into power wants to make changes in the educational system, with the result that the children become the guinea-pigs and the helpless

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victims. Nor are the changes always made in the interests of education. Sometimes it may be to discredit the previous government by showing up alleged deficiencies in its handling of education; sometimes to provide itself with a handy political slogan. Educational changes have, moreover, too often been made without adequate research, careful planning, consultation with educationists, teachers and parents, and timely provision of trained personnel, textbooks, etc.

NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR EDUCATION

Such would not be the case if educational policy and planning were handled by a body of educational experts and public men, not tied up with politics or owing obeisance to politicians, but concerned only with education, and functioning independently of changes of government. Such a body—a National Council of Education—could take a long-term view of education and plan for the future, without haste, without an eye on the elections, but with both eyes fixed on the child, and in consultation with parents, teachers and educationists. Had educational planning been the work of such a body, the need might not have arisen for the present government to make major changes so soon after assuming office—such changes as those pertaining to school admission age, the NCGE and the HNCE. For formulation of educational policy, therefore, there is need in this country of a body such as the *Central Council for Education* in Japan or the *Board of National Education* in the Philippines.

Far too long have the children of this country and its youth been the victims of hasty, ill-conceived, ill-digested, ill-planned and ill-provided educational changes. To those of us, parents or teachers, who have been close to children, it has been a painful experience to witness the sad situation in which the child has often found itself in the educational chaos that has prevailed in Sri Lanka.

There is, however, an exception. It is the politician's child. The very people who impose their educational fiats on the citizen and lay down how the latter should educate his or her child in the *svabhāṣā* medium and in the nearest school according to the area rule, somehow get their own children educated in the best schools in this country and abroad.

Shouldn't we see in the youth insurrection of 1971 more than mere political ambition or adventurism? Wasn't it rather an

outburst of resentment and indignation at the failure of elders to give them a fair deal? The youth know only too well that everyone cannot rise to the top of the ladder and get the best jobs. Nor do they expect it. What they do expect of their elders, especially of those who are responsible for the government of the country, is sincerity, honesty, justice and fairplay. This they expect in education more than in anything else, since their whole future depends on it.

UNIVERSITY AUTONOMY

Article in the 'Daily News', 27 February 1978

THERE is reason for politicians to be apprehensive of universities. Recent history has shown that universities can, not only turn out to be strongholds of opposition to governments, but even go to the extent of bringing about their downfall.

There have been instances in fact of universities spearheading agitation or movements that eventually toppled governments. Hence the tendency on the part of governments towards political control of universities by legislation and other measures. This is noticeable in the higher education acts passed in this country in the recent past.

It is understandable if university men—undergraduates, post-graduate students and staff—are more articulate than other citizens in criticizing governments. There are several reasons for this, both ideological and psychological.

AN INSTITUTION FOR THE ELITE

It is by a process of elimination throughout secondary schooling and by the final university entrance examination, which is the GCE A/L in Sri Lanka, that one is admitted to the university. It is obviously necessary to be selective in this way, for one must have the capacity and aptitude for the higher learning that the university seeks to impart.

Thus it happens that the university gathers into itself the more intelligent and capable among the citizens. Moreover, the fact that the university provides higher education gives a higher status to the institution, its staff and its students.

These two factors, namely, that university students are the more capable ones and that they are engaged in higher studies give the student a consciousness of his superior position in relation to others who have not been able to rise to that level. He will therefore naturally want to take leadership and be vocal not only on his own behalf but also on behalf of his fellows outside the university.

He might even feel that precisely because he has been raised to the position of a university student, he has a duty to speak on behalf of others who are of lower standing: that the privilege he has been given to study in the university is to be shared with those who have not been so fortunate by his defending and championing their causes. Psychologically, therefore, the university student feels that he is called to leadership in one way or another.

Having been given the opportunity for higher education, the university student will also be more concerned than others about employment opportunities. As one pursuing higher studies, he will expect, on completion of his studies, employment at a higher level with higher pay.

As politics is a factor that in modern life intimately affects the welfare of the citizen, the university student, especially in view of the fact that he finds himself placed in the intellectual atmosphere of the university, will also be interested in political ideologies, and even if he does not become the adherent and active supporter of anyone of them, he will at least follow closely the play of politics in the life of the country.

In relation to all these—the university student's position of leadership, his concern to obtain satisfactory employment after graduation, and his discerning interest in politics—the one institution in the country above all others to which his attention will be directed is the government. It should not be wondered at, therefore, that generally the university student is more active than others in scrutinizing and criticizing the conduct of politicians and governments.

STIFLING OF CRITICISM

However, governments have, in their own interest, sought in various ways to stifle the criticism and opposition that come from

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universities. One way in which they have attempted to do so is legislation; another is to appoint to positions of authority in universities their own men—party supporters or government loyalists—who they think would succeed in curbing and controlling opposition to them. But the remedy is worse than the disease—disease, of course, from the government's point of view. The human spirit cannot be kept in fetters, although one might succeed in muffling it by totalitarian measures.

Political interference of this nature means that the freedom a university should enjoy as a seat of higher learning is undermined, and perhaps destroyed. This strikes at the very nature of a university and the *raison d'être* of its existence. It is ironical that the state which, as generally happens, sets up and finances universities should also be the agent to destroy what is most precious to a university to achieve its purpose, its independence.

A university can of course be reduced to the level of a degree factory, as happens in totalitarian regimes. Just as factory hands turn out various articles, so the university staff might produce men who have followed set courses and passed prescribed examinations. But a university is expected to do much more than that. It has to produce men who have not merely gained knowledge, but by the free exercise of their intellectual and critical powers learnt to think independently and creatively.

Indeed what is special to university training is this creative aspect of education. This is noticed, for instance, in the requirement that a university student who, having mastered the basic knowledge at first-degree level, wishes to proceed further for a higher degree, has to do something creative, that is undertake research that will enable him to make an original contribution to knowledge.

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Even the student who does not proceed to a higher degree should be able to carry with him from the university that independent, critical, original and creative attitude and outlook. It is by the creative power the student will generate within himself by his university training that he will best serve society.

It is true that in expressing their opposition to the government students may sometimes overstep legitimate bounds and allow their opposition to escalate even into violence. Should that happen, the common law of the land and the normal law enforcement agencies should be able to meet the situation, just as similar situations are tackled elsewhere in the country. The possibility of such situations cropping up does not, however, justify the adoption by the government of preventive measures that might destroy university autonomy.

STATE-UNIVERSITY RELATIONS

The government, for its part, should, without attempting to gag university men, rather listen to them with special consideration, precisely because they are university men. What often happens unfortunately is that the government will take the stand that it is in the right and that they should therefore submit to the decisions of the Minister of Education or the government. Greater openness and readiness on the part of the government to consider complaints, criticisms and views that come from them could avert deterioration of state-university relations.

It will of course not always be possible to agree with them or grant their requests, but university students can generally be counted upon to accept decisions that are fair, impartial, just, sincere, and for the common good. They will, however, not tolerate hypocrisy, favouritism, partisanship and injustice. Even if the government should succeed in forcibly silencing them for the time being, sooner or later they will express their resentment in one way or another, sometimes in a way that can be destructive to the government.

It is by the creative power the student will generate within himself by his university training that he will best serve society.

The state and the university are like husband and wife, who cannot do without each other, and who must respect each other's rights and freedom, while at the same time working together for the good of the children, the citizens of the country.

A university that enjoys autonomy and in which the officials or official bodies responsible for its administration are invested with the necessary authority and the freedom to exercise such authority should be able to manage its own affairs without state interference. Moreover, more enlightened as they are, university men are doubtless capable of settling their affairs intelligently and responsibly.

Even though he who pays the piper may want to call the tune, the government should not interfere with the university to the extent of destroying its autonomy. But on the other hand, the university too, for its part, should take note of government policy and the needs of the country, and carry out its functions accordingly. The state and the university are like husband and wife, who cannot do without each other, and who must respect each other's rights and freedom, while at the same time working together for the good of the children, the citizens of the country.

To prevent the state's financial hold on universities leading to the danger of the state encroaching on their freedom and autonomy, some countries such as Great Britain and India, have set up a University Grants Commission or Committee through which state funds are channelled into universities. Such a body will take into consideration the needs, plans and aspirations of the university on the one hand, and state policy and the country's needs on the other. A go-between body of this nature has proved to be a practical solution of the problem of state dominance over universities. It must not be so constituted, however, as to become a mere tool of the government.

The decision of the present government to set up a University Grants Commission is decidedly a step in the right direction. We sincerely hope that this move will help cure many of the ills that have been afflicting higher education in this country for quite a long time.

DRUGS AND THE SCHOOLCHILD

Article in the 'Daily Mirror', 3 April 1978

IT is no secret that illegal traffic in drugs of various kinds is going on in this country. From time to time we read in the press of the detection by the police of the production or transport of contraband drugs. Some of these may be only mildly harmful, but there are others that are decidedly gravely injurious to the users; some are locally produced, others are smuggled into the country.

The police will have some knowledge of the extent of illicit drug use in the country, but we should expect it to be far more widespread in reality. There is much money in the trade. Hence the persistent pursuit of it against many odds and risks, evading police and customs detection in various subtle and secretive ways, and resorting also to bribery in a big way.

By drugs we mean substances with narcotic, hypnotic, hallucinogenic, depressive or stimulant properties. Alcohol, even where there is no prohibition, should also be included among drugs. Precisely because of its availability and wide use, the abuse of it is also equally extensive and can be a cause of great harm to the users and others.

CATEGORIES OF DRUG-ABUSERS

Drug-abusers may be broadly grouped into four categories. First there are the experimenters who are motivated by curiosity or social pressure and take drugs just to see what they are like. Then there are the casual users who seek pleasure and satisfaction from them and may also be motivated by social pressure, but they are not psychologically or physically dependent on them. To the third category belong the habitual users who require regular use of drugs and are motivated not only by pleasure orientation but also by primary psychological dependence. Finally come those who are so addicted to drugs that they have become slaves to them and are motivated by both psychological and physical dependence.

We are concerned in the present instance mainly with children and youth. Unaware of the real dangers, they may be led to the

use of drugs by their love of adventure, the desire to explore the unknown, the fascination of novelty, or mere bravado or spirit of challenge in doing what is prohibited. Or it may be the example or suggestion of a companion that will introduce them to it, or the wish to be 'mod' and ape their drug-relishing counterparts in the more developed societies.

The fact that they are physically and psychologically immature and drugs are therefore more injurious to them aggravates the situation. The regular user will need the wherewithal to procure drugs, and when he does not himself have the resources, he will be compelled to resort even to unlawful means of providing himself with the money he needs.

To what extent are parents, teachers and school heads in this country aware of the use of drugs by children and youth? Drug-users will understandably take every precaution not to get caught not only by the police but also by their elders. It is only occasionally that a parent will come to know that his or her child is a drug-user. But by then things may have gone too far and correction may be difficult. There are, however, signs, physical as well as behavioural, by which a drug-user can be known to some extent. Early detection is invaluable in curing the disease.

But prevention is better than cure, and forewarned is forearmed. This leads us to the whole field of drug abuse prevention education. There is need to educate children, parents, teachers, social workers and the public in general on the dangers of drug abuse and the ways and means of preventing it. An important aspect of prevention is the elimination of the causes that lead to drug abuse.

POSITIVE APPROACH

Treatment or rehabilitation of addicts is only something negative. A positive approach to the problem would be education with a view to prevention. In some Asian countries extensive programmes of education in drug abuse prevention have been successfully carried out. How far has anything similarly effective been done in Sri Lanka? This is a matter that should engage the attention not only of the government sector but also of the private sector involved in social work as well as the religious sector.

It is relevant to mention that in 1972 the Consultative Committee of the Colombo Plan recommended the appointment of a Drug

Adviser to the Colombo Plan Bureau in view of the need and importance of member governments adopting measures to eliminate the causes of drug abuse on the one hand and amelioration of the effects of drug abuse on the other. A Drug Adviser was accordingly appointed in 1973 and is attached to the Colombo Plan Bureau in Colombo. His advice and assistance are available in the organization of seminars, workshops, etc. in drug abuse prevention education.

Drug abuse is really not a problem of drugs but of people. This is particularly so in the case of adults. The causes of drug abuse by adults are rooted in life itself and its problems. They are bound up with one's perception of life and its meaning and purpose. People turn to drugs as a means of drowning life's cares and sorrows, as a way of reaching out to another 'world' from this one where they have failed to attain satisfaction and contentment. Drugs are sought after as a panacea for boredom, as a means of release from the strains and stresses of life, or as an antidote to them, or as a vehicle to reach a state of euphoria.

But the remedy is worse than the disease. Although resort to drugs may bring a momentary relief, in the long run it is destructive. Drug abuse prevention in the case of adults has therefore to look into various sociological and psychological factors that lead them to turn to drugs rather than seek a solution to their problems in other constructive ways. From this it follows that in respect of children, preparing them to face life's problems constructively, without having to have recourse to drugs, is an important aspect of drug abuse prevention education.

STRENGTHEN MORAL CHARACTER

The search for relief and contentment by the use of drugs often comes when one does not have the moral strength to contain life's

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The causes of drug abuse by adults are rooted in life itself and its problems.

Not infrequently it happens that the persons really to blame for children becoming drug-users are the parents themselves.

problems, when one does not find satisfaction in one's work or in the company of the members of one's family or community, when there is boredom in one's life, or when one is overwhelmed by frustration. It is necessary therefore to strengthen the moral character of children and impress upon them the desirability of a positive, constructive and courageous attitude and approach to life's problems instead of the defeatist attitude of seeking momentary and delusive relief through drugs.

It is important also to foster positive human values, to maintain and strengthen family and community life, and to encourage active interest and involvement in sports and physical fitness development, in pleasurable hobbies especially of the outdoor type, and in community service activities.

Not infrequently it happens that the persons really to blame for children becoming drug-users are the parents themselves. One should not be surprised if children who, as a result of parents being separated or divorced, do not have a happy home, do not receive the care, attention and affection of both father and mother, or are torn away from the company of parents and brothers and sisters, fall easy victims to drugs. They will turn to drugs to provide themselves with a substitute for what they have missed, namely, what a normal happy home would have provided them with.

Drug abuse prevention education can be carried out in each school by means of talks to pupils by guest speakers who are experts in the field, by organizing seminars, workshops, debates, group discussions, etc., and by means of posters, charts, slides, films, tape-recordings, leaflets, brochures, exhibitions and the like. But it would be helpful to schools if information, guidance, drug education literature, and trained personnel for lectures could be provided by a Drug Education Unit in the Department of Education. Such a unit could also organize seminars for teachers and school heads and provide training to teachers in Drug Education.

Vigilance, correct information, and understanding on the part of parents and teachers are necessary to protect our children from one of the worst scourges of modern society, drug abuse. Law enforcement, severe penalties for trafficking, and provision for treatment or rehabilitation of addicts are alone not sufficient. A more positive approach to the problem is called for. Drug abuse prevention education is a vitally important part of this positive approach. How far has Sri Lanka proceeded in this direction?

RELIGION IN THE SCHOOL

Article in the 'Sunday Times', 2 July 1978

OUTSIDE the Moslem world, most governments today leave to parents and ministers of religion the teaching of religion to the schoolchild, and confine themselves purely to secular education. Religion has therefore to be taught outside the school. Sri Lanka is one of the few countries in the world to make legal provision for the teaching of religion in the school itself. (Education Ordinance, No. 31 of 1939, sec. 29; No. 26 of 1947, sec. 4). Sri Lankan students are moreover required to offer religion as a subject for their first public examination.

It is true that you cannot make a man religious or righteous by law, and it might be argued, too, that the teaching of religion is not a function of the state but of religious bodies, which also is true; but the state concerned about the welfare of its citizens—the welfare, that is, of the *whole man*, not merely of his material well-being—is certainly doing the right thing in providing for the teaching of religion in the school.

IN KEEPING WITH TRADITION

Moreover, the concern Sri Lanka's government has shown to provide religious education is in harmony with, and the natural consequence of, the position religion has held in our traditional culture and our traditional system of education. For over two millenia religion has been a dominant spiritual and cultural force in the lives of our people. It has permeated our culture through and through. King and commoner alike have been guided by it in their personal lives as well as in their relations with fellow-men.

The religiousness that happily pervades our society still, which is a heritage we should endeavour to preserve and pass on to posterity, flows from our traditional culture. Indeed, a Sri Lankan statesman of the twentieth century—Mr J. R. Jayewardene, our President—would not be drawing the nation's attention to the values of a

dharmiṣṭha society if not for the centuries of religion behind our culture. And it was for the purpose of transmitting to succeeding generations the religious values of our culture that pride of place was given to religion in the *pansala* and *pirivena* schools of the traditional school system.

It is therefore but right that we continue to give an important place to religion in our educational system in spite of the fact that the pattern of the traditional system of education had to change under the impact of new developments in educational science and new scientific and technological knowledge and for the purpose of meeting the requirements of a modern age.

Religion, however, cannot be taught like other subjects. Religious education is much more than imparting a knowledge of religious doctrines. A knowledge of doctrine does not necessarily make one a religious man. Indeed, one might acquire a very good knowledge of a religious faith without even being an adherent of it. Religious education implies both learning of the faith and learning to live it: it is a training to a way of life affecting our ideals, attitudes, character and conduct. It is a training that should not be confined to the classroom but should overflow from it into the entire school life of the pupil.

It was to provide such a religious education that the denominational school system came into being. It was a system of partnership between the state and religious bodies. The latter were given

The state concerned about the welfare of its citizens—the welfare, that is, of the whole man, not merely of his material well-being—is certainly doing the right thing in providing for the teaching of religion in the school.

Religious education implies both learning of the faith and learning to live it: it is a training to a way of life affecting our ideals, attitudes, character and conduct.

To the child mind, the teacher's example is a more convincing and inspiring argument for the faith—an object-lesson—than the religious doctrines he teaches.

The religion teacher must be able to teach from a position of personal conviction translated concretely into one's own life.

the opportunity and facilities to impart a religious education, while the former gave financial aid and supervised education. The system enabled religious denominations, in whose hands the management of the schools lay, to provide their pupils not only with religious instruction but also with opportunities for the exercise of religion. The services of ministers of religion were also made available to the pupils.

This was a practical and workable system by which the state and religious denominations jointly fulfilled their responsibilities towards the child, the state providing education and the religious denominations giving the religious dimension to that education. But it had its shortcomings, even in regard to religious education itself. Pupils of other faiths who attended these schools received no religious instruction.

For instance, the Catholic Church, which insisted so much on the need of religion in education and saw to it that Catholic pupils were given an education in a Catholic atmosphere in Church schools, was not prepared at that time to provide the non-Catholic pupils attending its schools instruction in their respective faiths. There were in fact Catholic schools where the great majority of the pupils were of other faiths, and yet they had no religious instruction at all in the school. In state schools, on the other hand, every child was required to be taught its faith. The Catholic attitude on this point was thus an anomaly in the light of state policy.

TRADITION CONTINUES IN DENOMINATIONAL SYSTEM

The denominational school system was as it were a projection into our times, with the necessary modifications, of the traditional school system in which religion had so important a part to play. Its defects and shortcomings could have been remedied and the system preserved but unfortunately it came to an end with the schools' takeover in 1960.

By the takeover of schools the government also took solely upon itself the responsibility of teaching religion in all the schools except the handful that remained private. But can one be satisfied with the religious education that is being given in state schools? Even today there are state schools that are virtually denominational, schools in which all the pupils, teachers and the principal are of the same faith. This applies mainly to schools where pupils and teachers are all Buddhists. But is religion satisfactorily taught

even in such schools? What seems to be lacking is the spirit, commitment and dedication of the old denominational system.

It was presumably the realization that all is not well with religion in schools that made the last government take certain steps towards providing better religious instruction in schools, such as the setting up of advisory bodies for religious education and initiating the training of religion teachers—a very commendable venture indeed.

It is our hope that the present government will direct its attention to this important matter of bringing more religion into the school. In a country deeply influenced by religion for over two thousand years and in which the world's major religious traditions (Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity) are strongly represented, it is from religion that we should expect its citizens to draw inspiration, guidance and ideals for the building up of a *dharmisṭha* society. It is important therefore that the child from its very early years be provided the opportunity of growing up in a religious atmosphere both in the home and in the school.

To bring more religion into the school it would be necessary, in the first place, to provide more time (more periods) for religious instruction. By instruction is meant not only the teaching of the faith but also religious exercises that would help make that faith a living reality in the personal lives of the pupils. It is necessary also that there should be close contact between the school and the temple (or church or mosque), between the school and ministers of religion or persons committed to religion—which obtained in the denominational system. It should be looked into how in practice this contact could be effectively brought about in the present school setup.

TEACHER'S EXAMPLE—OBJECT-LESSON

But the success of religious education depends above all on the teacher. In the teaching of other subjects the personal life of the teacher would not matter so much. All that is needed in the teacher for those subjects to be taught well is the requisite knowledge, knowledge of teaching methods, and ability to teach. This would not be sufficient for the teaching of religion. Religious instruction by a teacher who does not practise what he teaches can hardly be expected to have an appeal to the pupil. To the child mind, the teacher's example is a more convincing and inspiring argument for the faith—an object-lesson—than the religious doctrines he

teaches. The religion teacher must be able to teach from a position of personal conviction translated concretely into one's own life. The teacher must be a committed and dedicated follower of the faith and should be actively interested in sharing the faith with the pupils.

There certainly is need to train specialist teachers for religion, but the choice of the right persons, persons who live and value their faith, is all important. If what is uppermost in the mind of the candidate for training is the opportunity for employment or preferment and not service to his or her faith in the teaching profession, it is unlikely that such a person will prove to be a good teacher of religion. The government should also take advantage of the availability for training and appointment as religion teachers of persons who are already committed to religion such as *bhikkhus* and other religious men and women.

To see that the teaching of religion is effectively carried out in schools there is need also of competent persons to function as supervisors. Their task would not be merely to supervise the teaching but to contribute more constructively towards better teaching of religion. They could give guidance to teachers, arrange seminars and refresher courses for them, see that schools are provided with a sufficient number of religion teachers, organize inter-school competitions, exhibitions, etc. The possibility of appointment of at least regional supervisors for each religion should be considered. Their work could be directed and coordinated if there would also be at the centre an official—a Director of Religious Education—for overall supervision of the teaching of religion in schools.

Today more than ever before there are various factors affecting the lives of children adversely—pornography, drugs, materialistic ideologies, etc. Hence the need to have religion in their lives as a force militating against the evil influences to which they are exposed. Parents and teachers as well as the state and religious bodies who are concerned about the welfare of our future citizens should therefore work together and interestedly to bring more religion into the school.

EDUCATION IS SOCIAL WORK

Article in the 'Social Justice' (Annual), 1978

IN recent times we have heard it repeatedly stated by members of some Catholic religious orders that have hitherto been engaged in education in this country for a long time, some for over a century, that they have now to disengage themselves from educational activity so as to be able to give themselves more fully to social work which, they say, is more in keeping with the particular charism of their respective orders.

In fact, more members of these orders are now being directed into the field of social work than in the past; even some of those assigned to schools have been taken out for the social apostolate; and the desire has been insistently expressed by these orders to hand over to the government the few schools that still remain in their hands.

It is true that by 'social work' we generally mean what we do for the material benefit and betterment of man. Providing the have-nots with food, clothing and shelter is social work; caring for the orphan, the destitute, the physically or mentally handicapped, the alcoholic, the drug-addict, the delinquent, etc. is social work; nursing and care of the sick and the aged is social work. In all these activities it is the physical and material needs of man that are looked after, although the moral and spiritual aspects are not altogether overlooked. The emphasis is on the material side of man's life.

SOCIAL WORK IS NOT MATERIAL HELP ONLY

Social work is really what we do for the needy members of the community or society. And since such work is concerned with *man* it should actually cover a wider field than man's material needs. In the case of an animal, it would do to provide it with food and shelter. In respect of man, however, this would not be sufficient. Man, endowed with reason, has also an intellectual part of his being to be catered for. His mental and spiritual needs and welfare must also be looked after. Just as there can be need, and therefore

poverty, in the physical and material order—need of food, clothing, shelter, medical care, etc.—so also there can be need and poverty in the intellectual, moral and spiritual order. Hence social work should have the whole man as its objective: it should be truly *human*, embracing both the material and spiritual needs of man.

Education, which lies mainly in the intellectual order—not to speak of the physical, moral and spiritual training that goes with it—should therefore be part of the social apostolate. Education is the imparting of knowledge to those who do not have it—therefore to the needy. Hence education is as much social work as providing food to the hungry. The teacher in the school, therefore, is also engaged in social work.

The social dimension in education may be considered from other aspects.

Education, though desirable for its own sake, is today very much job-oriented. The one great concern of the pupil in the school is to prepare himself for future employment. As soon as the period of general education is over, he will choose, in the secondary school itself, his subjects or courses of study with his future career in mind. Parents and teachers too have employment as the target of the education given to the young. Not only is education necessary for employment, but higher levels of education are necessary for the more remunerative jobs. Hence educating a child today means largely providing him with the wherewithal to earn his living in adult life.

A social worker might give a poor man his meals, or help him get on his feet and earn his own living. One is reminded of the

Just as there can be need, and therefore poverty, in the physical and material order—need of food, clothing, shelter, medical care, etc—so also there can be need and poverty in the intellectual, moral or spiritual order.

Social work should have the whole man as its objective: it should be truly human, embracing both the material and spiritual needs of man.

Education is as much social work as providing food to the needy.

If it is the special charism of a religious order to do social work, then education must surely come within the scope of its activities.

Chinese proverb which says that if you give a man a fish you give him just one meal, but if you teach him to fish you provide him with the means of getting many meals by himself. This is what happens in education. Education is teaching the pupil to 'fish'—to fish for his bread and butter, or rice and curry. Education is therefore social work in the sense that during schooling the pupil is prepared for a future career by which he will be able to provide himself—and his family when he is married—with his material needs. The better the education in relation to employment, the better also will be the pupil's chances of a decent living later on. The Religious in dedicating themselves to education are therefore engaged in social work even from the point of view of man's material needs and welfare. Education is long-term social work.

EDUCATION NOT CONFINED TO CLASSROOM

It is being increasingly realized, moreover, that education cannot be confined to the classroom or the school campus. This is true especially in view of the school's position in relation to the community. Just as a school is a product of the community—that is, its lands, buildings, equipment and maintenance are provided by the community, whether it is run by the state, local bodies or voluntary organizations—so also does the school have obligations to the community. The main obligation is of course to provide the community with educated men and women.

Apart from that, the school should also be interested in the community, especially the local community, the community of its neighbourhood. This interest should not only lead the school to have concern for, and where possible be involved in, the life of the community, but also its relations with the community should be a means of inculcating in the pupils a social and civic consciousness from their early years. In other words, the school should be a place where the pupil is prepared for his adult life not only as an individual but also as a member of society. The school should be the training ground for the future citizen's social responsibilities. Social education should form part of the pupil's school education. The school's contact and association with the local community and its contribution, in what ways it can, to the welfare of the community will both engender in the pupil a social consciousness and provide training in social and community participation. An

important aspect of education, therefore, is the preparation of the pupil for his social responsibilities.

Furthermore, the school provides the principal and staff opportunity for close contact with the families of the pupils. To understand and help a child in the school, its home environment has also to be taken into account. Especially where things have gone wrong in the home, affecting the child's studies and sometimes also its physical, moral or spiritual life, it becomes necessary for the principal or a teacher to contact the parents for the sake of the child. Such contact may give the school personnel a chance to help the parents themselves. This is particularly so when the school is run by Religious, in whom parents are likely to have greater confidence and whose advice they would more readily accept. The school thus provides opportunity for social work extending also to the families of the pupils.

It will be seen therefore that education is social work from many angles. If it is the special charism of a religious order to do social work, then education must surely come within the scope of its activities.

YEAR OF THE CHILD IS YEAR OF THE ADULT

Article in the 'Social Justice' (Annual), 1979

THE year 1979 has been proclaimed International Year of the Child by the United Nations. Its purpose, a very laudable one, is to draw the world's attention to the needs and rights of the child, so often overlooked and ignored in a world all too full of selfishness, greed and violence, a world that is becoming more and more an unsafe place for a child to be born into and live in.

A child cannot come into being without adults. Nor can a child grow up and reach maturity without the care, protection, affection and help of adults. The child is in fact so dependent on the adult that you cannot think of a child's being and welfare separate from the adult. A Year of the Child must therefore necessarily be a Year of the Adult as well—an occasion for us to give serious thought to adult obligations and responsibilities towards the child.

THE CHILD AND THE FAMILY

A child comes into being and grows in the bosom of the family. When the family breaks up, the child will inevitably suffer in consequence. One of my saddest experiences as a teacher and school head has been to see how adversely children are affected by family breakups, which regrettably are steadily increasing from year to year in this country too, especially among the upper strata of society. The vacuum which children of broken homes experience in their lives in being deprived of the personal care, attention and affection of father or mother or both, the embarrassment sensed by them on discovering, as they grow older, that they have been let down and left in the lurch by the very persons who brought them into the world, and the resentment and bitterness they feel as a result of all this affect their lives very deeply.

Even if provision is made for such children to be cared for and brought up by relatives or friends or institutions, they will still miss

something of far greater value to them than material comfort, namely, the affection of their parents. No one else, however kind-hearted, can give a child the tender affection that springs from the heart of a parent, and the care and concern for the child that follow from such affection.

How much one would wish that a husband and wife, when faced with problems that might strain relations between them, or even when brought to the brink of a break-up, thought more of their children than of themselves. In the last analysis, it is often selfishness that is at the bottom of marital break-ups. If a husband is not willing, or not prepared to take meaningful steps, to give up liquor that is causing family strife, or a husband or wife is reluctant to sever connections with an illicit partner, or one is not prepared to make a sacrifice of one's personal convenience or comfort for the sake of one's partner or children, then one is surely seeking self-satisfaction at the expense of one's partner and children.

Providing a child with its material needs is not sufficient to make its life happy. The child craves for and should receive the affection that only parents can give. Even if parents are not in a position to provide children with all their material needs, the children will still be happy if they can see in their parents a genuine affection for them.

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Even if parents are not in a position to provide children with all their material needs, the children will still be happy if they can see in their parents a genuine affection for them.

When a vacuum is created in the lives of children by the absence of parental love and happy home life, it should not surprise us if they turn to drugs, sex, violence, etc to fill the vacuum.

It is a sad reflection that the unhappiness of many children is caused by the parents themselves.

A fundamental consideration, if we care at all for the child, whether born or unborn, is the sacredness of life.

Do we not see even in animal life the tender care and affection especially the mother has for the young? When a vacuum is created in the lives of children by the absence of parental love and happy home life, it should not surprise us if they turn to drugs, sex, violence, etc. to fill the vacuum. It is a sad reflection that the unhappiness of many children is caused by the parents themselves.

THE CHILD AND SOCIETY

Beyond the inner circle of the family is the wider world of human society of which the child is a young member who has to be protected, nurtured and educated by the adult members. It is the adults who have to see that the child is placed in an environment that is conducive to its healthy growth into maturity.

Today the world is fearfully aware of the dangers of environmental pollution. National and international bodies are taking steps to prevent the dangers to health and life from pollution of the environment. In this way we are trying to make the physical environment safe for our children. But what about the moral environment? Shouldn't we be concerned that children are provided a moral environment too that is healthy?

But, in point of fact, is the moral environment in which our children find themselves a healthy one? If there is in our society injustice and inhumanity, guile and greed, hypocrisy and humbug, deceit and dishonesty, dissension and discord, lewdness and lust, vice and violence, corruption and crime, can the environment be a morally healthy one for the child? The situation is aggravated by the fact that mass media make the child constantly conscious of the moral pollution around him.

Our President, Mr J. R. Jayewardene, has spoken of the need to create a *dharmisṭha* society in our land. If this is to be done, is it not primarily for the sake of the children? The government spends a very large part of public funds to provide education to our children and youth. We are worried about malnutrition of children. We take measures to protect children healthwise. But are we concerned also about creating a *dharmisṭha* environment for them? Every effort should therefore be made by parents, teachers and the public in general to see that our children grow up in an environment that is healthy not only physically but also morally and spiritually.

Isn't there also the deplorable fact that there are adults who are guilty of crimes against children? For the sake of material gain there are those who resort to child labour, who traffic in drugs and pornography, who employ children as pickpockets and beggars, who sacrifice them to sex perverts, who treat harshly, cruelly and even inhumanly children employed as domestic servants. Not only should there be a public outcry against such crimes, but the government and law enforcing agencies should take effective measures to eliminate such evils from our society.

What of the crimes against unborn children? We tend to take lightly the rights of the child still in the mother's womb. Would the law permit a child just born to be murdered for the convenience of parents—because the parents are poor, or they already have several children, or the mother is ailing and cannot look after the child? It is equally murder to destroy the child that has come into being but is not yet born. A fundamental consideration, if we care at all for the child, whether born or unborn, is the sacredness of life.

The purpose of the International Year of the Child will hardly be achieved if it is going to be confined to mere functions, speech-making, competitions for children, and the like. We have to go to a much deeper level and try to remedy the evils that bring unhappiness into the lives of children and even cause positive harm and misery to them. The culprits are the adults, and therefore sincere soul-searching on their part is necessary, which should be followed up with genuine resolves and effective action to make the world a happier place for children.

CORRUPTION IN PUBLIC LIFE

Address given as Rector of Aquinas College, Colombo,
at its Graduation Ceremony on 24 November 1980

Daily Mirror, 25 November 1980

NOT long ago an American professor of religion, Professor John Ross Carter of Colgate University, brought out a book on religion in Sri Lanka with chapters contributed by a group of Sri Lankan members of the four great religious traditions in this country—Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity. I was invited to write the chapter on Catholicism which I did. The book was entitled *Religiousness in Sri Lanka*.

Admittedly there is a religiousness in our country which strikes especially the visitor from secularized Western society. Our traditional culture is predominantly religious, as evidenced by the remains of our ancient architecture, sculpture and painting, our classical literature, our social customs, our rites and ceremonies. Sri Lanka takes pride in being the country that has preserved Buddhism in its purest form, and preserved also the precious religious heritage of the Pali canonical scriptures. Today too there are numerous temples, mosques and churches throughout the country. Ministers of religion, in their distinctive robes, are a familiar sight. There is legal provision for the teaching of religion in schools. Religious ritual often forms part of even civil functions. Our constitution lays down that it shall be the duty of the state to protect and foster the *Buddha Sāsana*, while other religions are assured of their freedom. As a result of all these, there is an atmosphere of religion, a religiousness, in our society. There aren't many countries in the world where a similar religiousness prevails.

RELIGIOUSNESS WITHOUT RIGHTEOUSNESS

In spite of all this religiousness, does religion really reach our inner selves and lead us to righteous living? The ideal of a *dharmīṣṭha* society has of late been loudly placed before us. A postage stamp

keeps reminding us of it all the time. But how *dharmiṣṭha* or righteous are we? Righteousness and religion go hand in hand. A truly religious man will surely be righteous. But the fact is that however religious our society may seem to be, righteousness is a sparse commodity among us.

Would it be an exaggeration to say that our society is reeking of corruption, dishonesty and thieving of every description? Corruption has in fact become a way of life with us. Dishonesty leaves the conscience undisturbed. "I steal, you steal, he steals; all of us, high and low, big and small, steal; so why worry about it?" seems to be the way we feel about it. We have reached the stage when we no longer regard it as an evil. The only evil is to get caught. We are a people blessed with intelligence, but we are also adepts at using it the wrong way to do the most crooked things. We have produced crooks of international notoriety, but we have also innumerable pocket editions of them. A few sprats may get caught now and then, but the sharks escape, and they know how to escape.

It is not infrequently that people are put into great inconvenience in getting things done especially by the public sector. It is not seldom that they meet with indifference, callousness, lethargy, discourtesy and arrogance on the part of officials. The old practice of public officials referring to themselves as 'your obedient servant' has vanished and with it seemingly also the spirit of courteous and prompt service. Public officials seem to forget that they are in fact servants of the public and are being paid by the public. We meet officials who act as if they are the lords and masters and the public their servants. Rarely is a letter acknowledged today. The citizen is denied even the doubtful consolation of being informed that "the matter is receiving attention."

To get a thing done effectively one has to have recourse to one of two things—*influence* or *bribe*. But *influence* too fails at times so

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that one is left with only the bribe. It is the 'open sesame' that will get a cold and callous official to smile and go into action, that will find a file allegedly missing or misplaced, that will quickly cut through red tape, that will get your work done promptly without your having to come repeatedly until you give up in disgust, that will produce passes at public examinations or bring forth bogus certificates, that will get a child admitted to a school. But of course a bribe is not always called so. Bribe is a disreputable term. It has other labels, even respectable ones.

HAS RELIGION FAILED ?

How do you explain so much corruption in a society that professes to be religious? Has religion failed? It is not that religion has failed, but we have failed religion. We have failed to be honest even in the practice of our religious faiths. We have not guided our lives by the religious teachings we profess. What often passes for religion is outward demonstrations of religious practice, mere ceremonial, or observance of tradition.

The founders of the religions we profess will surely not approve of the way we treat their teachings. If the Buddha, Mohammed, Christ or the sages of Hinduism were to come among us, they are sure to decry so many of the things we do in the name of religion. They are sure to tell us that the success of their religious teachings is to be measured, not by the number or grandeur of the temples, mosques and churches we build or by the solemnity of our religious functions and festivals, but by the transformation religion makes in our inner lives, in other words, by the extent to which religion makes us righteous. They will certainly condemn the hypocrisy of our external show of religiousness without inner purity.

What has all this got to do with education, you might ask. As educators and educationists we have necessarily to be concerned

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We educate for life, not just for rupees and cents.

about public morality. We educate for life, not just for rupees and cents. We want the children and youth we educate to live and grow up in a morally healthy atmosphere.

It is a basic principle in educational psychology that the child is affected by its environment. Today we are much concerned about the physical environment. Special laws are being passed in some countries and great sums of money being spent by governments and international bodies to prevent environmental pollution. Shouldn't we take pains to prevent also moral pollution of the society in which our children have to grow up? Making moral education a compulsory school subject or imposing a code of ethics on schoolchildren, as is being contemplated, will seem hypocritical and is not likely to be of much benefit as long as children have to live in a society steeped in corruption.

A conscious and concerted effort will have to be made by the government, religious bodies, social workers, educators and all public-spirited men to stem the tide of corruption in our society. More stringent legislation if necessary; severe punishment of offenders, big and small, whatever their political affiliation; efforts to create a public awareness of the need to cleanse our society of corruption; vigilance and effective action on the part of those in authority to see that servants of the public serve the public honestly, promptly, impartially and courteously—these and other measures should be availed of to fight this evil.

As an educator, I appeal, in the name of the young, to all who love our country to do all they can to purify the moral environment in which our future citizens are to be brought up.

DISHONESTY OUR GREATEST VICE

Address given as Rector of Aquinas College, Colombo,
at its Graduation Ceremony on 13 July 1981

Daily News, 15 July 1981

IT is well known that the environment has a bearing on our lives—on all life, in fact, whether of human beings, animals or plants. That is why we are at great pains to prevent pollution of the atmosphere. But we have to take note also of the fact that the moral atmosphere too can be polluted, and, if so, have an adverse effect on society, especially on the young. Educators know only too well that their efforts to set their educands on the right path are often thwarted when the latter have to live in a society that is morally corrupt. Education is a task that has to be carried out in partnership by three agencies—the school, the family, and society. The individual is educated not only for his own benefit and the benefit of his family, but also for the benefit of society. Reciprocally the school must have the assistance of society to carry out its functions successfully. In fact, most schools are built, equipped and maintained with public funds, that is, with the assistance of society. But material assistance alone is not enough. Society must also have a wholesome moral influence on the student. That is why educators are necessarily concerned about moral standards in public life.

Not long ago, on 3rd May last to be exact, it was reported in a local newspaper, the *Weekend Sun*, that “as a result of dishonest practices resorted to by private candidates sitting public examinations, it has become difficult for the Examinations Department to conduct examinations in a proper and judicious manner.” The paper went on to say that a circular had been sent by the Commissioner of Examinations to all heads of schools and presiding officers of examination centres emphasizing that it has become imperative that they should be extra vigilant and adopt precautionary measures to eliminate recurrence of dishonesty at examinations.

Dishonesty at public examinations, which has been on the increase in recent years, is only a fraction of the whole: it is only one small area of the wide field of social and public life in this country in which dishonesty is rampant today. We cannot blame examination candidates alone when as a matter of fact dishonesty is a moral disease widespread in our society.

DISHONESTY—MULTITUDE OF SHAPES AND SHADES

In my address on graduation day last year I dwelt at some length on the evil of bribery and corruption. Corruption, however, is only one dishonest practice. Dishonesty takes various other forms and appears in a multitude of shapes and shades. Dishonesty has assumed such proportions in our society that one would not be far too wrong, I think, in concluding that it is our greatest vice.

When big frauds and robberies occur, such as the robbing of banks, public attention is drawn to them because of the large sums of money involved, and everybody feels and agrees that a great crime has been committed. The state investigators of crime instantly go into action in a big way to get at the culprits.

But there are other robberies that go on constantly under our very noses in our day-to-day life and which, though so common and involving smaller amounts, are nonetheless an evil springing from the same human source as the big robberies, namely, dishonesty and fraud. I say *human* source, because in the case of animals, they may fight and even devour one another but there is no dishonesty among them. Only man is dishonest.

The citizen in our society is the victim of thieving of one form or another going on all the time. In the process of daily living one has to encounter robbers of various types. The profiteer and blackmarketeer, now gloriously reigning and massively drawing in

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the shekels taking mean advantage of human need, are damnable robbers. The man who sells underweight or adulterated goods is a robber. The producer or trader who arbitrarily raises prices under one pretext or another is a robber. The middleman who manipulates prices so as to get the maximum for himself, ignoring the labour and sweat of the producer and the needs of the customer, is a robber. The man who resorts to such morally despicable means of making money as peddling pornography or dangerous drugs is a robber. The con man who uses his subtle wits to hoodwink fellowmen is a robber. It is not infrequently that one falls a prey to and is fleeced by unscrupulously dishonest men such as those I have mentioned. In this country their number is legion.

There are still other ways of thieving not uncommon among us. The employee who does not honestly do his work for the salary he is paid is as much guilty of thieving as the employer who does not adequately remunerate the employee. The worker who takes it easy and neglects his work, who attends to private concerns when he should be working for his employer, who is absent or late without legitimate cause, who takes leave to work elsewhere, who takes overtime pay for work that could very well have been done during normal working hours, is thieving, for he gets full pay for work only partly done. If the public is experiencing great difficulty in getting a thing done especially by the public sector, is it not largely due to the fact that there are far too many employees who do not do an honest day's work? And of course the employees who help themselves to what they can fraudulently grab in cash or in kind from the employer, which again is more common in the public sector, are downright robbers. Frauds and rackets, big and small, by the high and the low, have become commonplace in our society.

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DISHONESTY IN THE TEACHING PROFESSION

We are specially concerned about what is going on in the field of education. No amount of money spent on school buildings, laboratories, workshops, playgrounds, etc will produce the desired results unless we have teachers who will do their work honestly and with a sense of responsibility, dedication and commitment. Teaching is traditionally a respected and noble profession, the profession of the *guru*. But mercenary motives and dishonesty seem to have invaded the careers of some members of this profession too.

An educational phenomenon that has assumed enormous proportions in this country is private tuition. I can understand students of A/L classes wanting tuition, because gaining admission into the universities has become highly competitive. But today pupils of lower grades too have to be given tuition. Private tuition is so common that it has become almost a parallel private system of education alongside the national system of school education. Moreover, the state policy of free education is nullified when parents have to spend so much money to get their children educated outside the school.

If the education imparted in the school is inadequate, is it not at least partly due to the fact that there are teachers who are too often absent, come late to school, do not prepare their work, do not go over the exercises of their pupils, or are too engrossed in their private tuitions? Wouldn't it be grossly dishonest for a teacher to

The common man in this country knows only too well that the political arena is not one in which honesty is a shining virtue.

This island could indeed be made a paradise but honesty is the only path that will lead to that goal.

Can we blame students for being dishonest at examinations when they live and move and have their being in a society in which dishonesty is so much part of our life?

There is need in our country of men in public life and in high places who could be to the rank and file, especially to our youth and children, edifying and inspiring models of unshakeable honesty and integrity.

draw a salary for work only carelessly, half-heartedly and negligently done in the school? If teachers are dishonest where their work is concerned, how can we expect their pupils to be inspired by them to be men of integrity?

I have already referred to bribery, a glaringly dishonest practice widely prevalent in our society. The bribe-taker demands extra remuneration for services for which he is already paid. Members of the public are constrained to resort to bribes when there is no other way of getting things done. Those who are prepared to accede to the wishes of the bribe-taker are looked after, while others who are unwilling or cannot afford to pay the bribe are ignored. They are denied services to which they are entitled. This is discrimination that is blatantly unjust and dishonest. But bribetaking, under many labels and guises, is going on at various levels on a massive scale in this country.

DISHONESTY IN THE POLITICAL FIELD

Dishonesty among politicians has not only been brought to the notice of the public by official probes, but the common man in this country knows only too well that the political arena is not one in which honesty is a shining virtue. He knows that this is a sector in which there is much selfish self-seeking by people who pretend to be patriots. Apart from the dishonest dealings of individuals in political positions high and low, there are the pompous promises made by politicians, of whatever shade, to make this country a paradise; the unflinching condemnation of past governments by the government in power for the existing ills; the trumpet-blowing over achievements yet to come; the calculated denunciations of the government in power by those who failed at the hustings or hope to capture power next time—all these, the citizen knows, have to be taken, to say the least, with a grain of salt. This island could indeed be made a paradise, but honesty is the only path that will lead to that goal.

There is dishonesty even among our beggars. Our beggar population is not a small one. There are beggars at religious shrines, on trains, in public places; beggars in our streets pestering passers-by; beggars besieging tourists; beggars at our door. But many of those who pose as beggars are not beggars at all. They find begging an easy, though deceitful, way of making money. Camouflaged as destitutes, they succeed in evoking the sympathy of unsuspecting

persons and getting their help. This is thieving, not begging. The needy are certainly deserving of help, but not idle impostors, who could make an honest living in other ways.

On the subject of dishonesty among us, one could go on and on. It is a malignant moral malady. It makes its appearance in a multitude of forms and at all levels. It is a sad reflection that dishonesty reigns in a society that is professedly religious. Is it that we are only paying lip service to religion? In any case, can we blame students for being dishonest at examinations when they live and move and have their being in a society in which dishonesty is so much part of our life?

How shall we combat this evil? Legislation and law enforcement can certainly curb crime to some extent but cannot make men virtuous. There is need in our country of a national consciousness of the dignity of honesty, of the meanness and contemptible nature of dishonesty of every type, of the indispensability of honesty for the well-being and progress of any country or society. There is need of our realization that religion must be personally practised, not publicly paraded. There is need in our country of men in public life and in high places who could be to the rank and file, especially to our youth and children, edifying and inspiring models of unshakeable honesty and integrity. May Sri Lanka be blessed with such men.

EDITORIAL

Daily News, 22 July 1981

THE UGLY TRUTH

The Very Revd Father W. L. A. Don Peter, Rector of Aquinas College, a son of the soil, has served Sri Lanka too long and too well to be shouted down easily by elements who resort to personal or sectarian imputations to denigrate any critic.

To begin with, the Rector of Aquinas was, perhaps, only stating in clearer terms, observations which are heard often enough in our homes today and at other private meetings.

The standards of honesty and personal integrity, which humanity once upheld as basic to our way of life, are fast being eroded.

In a permissive age, anything goes, perhaps. It could be that popular politics throughout the world, too, leads persons to expediency—and expediency inevitably to compromise with ideals.

Fr Don Peter has been bold enough to declare that dishonesty has assumed such proportions in our society that, to his mind, it has become our greatest national vice. Drunkenness, gambling, prostitution and a variety of other evils are to be found in our land—as indeed they are to be witnessed anywhere on this earth.

But we, in Sri Lanka, are generally guilty of the folly of deluding ourselves. That could be the crux of the question: not merely dishonesty, but intellectual dishonesty. We have grown adept in the art of deceiving ourselves, preening borrowed feathers, concealing the dirt under some carpet.

What schoolboys sometimes do at public examinations is only symbolic of the frauds we perpetrate or condone in the larger circles of society.

It is well known that you could get away with many forms of corruption if you only give them the appearance of respectability—a polite designation for example; not a bribe, you know, but the usual commission; no procuring or supplying women, but a holiday, just hospitality with the usual perks thrown in; all on the house—even the brandy that your Customs officers back home may have been ordered to take by their doctors.

Our rackets today are like works of modern art, not always easy to comprehend. There are the jobs you contrive for the boys young and not so young, for the girls, young and ever-green; there are the contracts that are awarded; the trips abroad; there is the contact man or—better still—the contact woman who will put in a word for you, as they say.

The whole environment, as Fr Don Peter seemed to suggest, betrays signs of moral decay. But then morality itself, like religion—successful men of our times will urge—is outdated. For money, today, is the measure of success: riches the measure by which a man's worth is tested.

His fortune, his car, life-style—those are the factors that go to establish his worth.

Not only have we in Sri Lanka, over the decades, reversed some of our traditional values, but we often go on to give a pious gloss to our own knavery. The flatterer is a loyalist. We choose to hear only what we like to hear. Sadly enough, we have grown smug in our self-indulgence, in our duplicity and—saddest of all—in boastful estimate of ourselves.

Fr Don Peter could well have jolted his immediate audience at the Aquinas Graduation ceremony last week. But no matter what slander is hurled at him, he would have rendered a national service if his stern reproach awakens others to the truth growing around us.

We're again plainly witnessing the spectacle of a wise man seeking the aid of some candle light, even by day, to search out an honest man.

DISHONESTY IN RELIGION

Address given as Rector of Aquinas College, Colombo,
at its Graduation Ceremony on 11 October 1982

Saturday Review, 13 November 1982

SRI Lankans take pride in the fact that religion has been a major influence in the lives of the people from ancient times. It is religion, more than any other factor, that has inspired, shaped and moulded our traditional culture—our language and literature, our sculpture, painting and architecture, our social customs and traditions, our systems of education, our philosophy of life. Religion influenced and guided, not only the common citizen in his personal and social life, but also the king and his councillors in the government of the country. It was under the impetus of religion that our ancient *vihāras* and *pirivenas* became seats of education, learning and scholarship. It is not without justification therefore that Sri Lanka has been called 'Dharma Dvīpa'.

The tradition of religiousness that characterized life in ancient Lanka no doubt still persists, but with a noticeable and notable difference. There is certainly an atmosphere of religion in the country if we are to judge by the numerous temples, kovils, mosques and churches dotting our land, the large number of wayside shrines that have sprung up, the religious festivals and pageants held in ever increasing splendour, the statutory provision made for the teaching of religion in schools, the observance of religious rites even at civil and state functions, the prominence given to religion in our constitution, the sermonizing of even our politicians and their pompous protestations of devotion and dedication to religion. But still, when you look deeper into the matter, you are led, however reluctantly, to the disconcerting conclusion that a great deal of all this is but sounding brass and tinkling cymbal.

It is no doubt true that there have been criminals in the past as there are now. It is true also that today too there are many adherents of the various faiths who take their respective religions seriously and strive to live by their teachings. Nevertheless one

cannot help feeling that there is also a big difference between religion in our time and what it was in former days.

WHAT AFFLICTS RELIGION

What afflicts religion today is that there is a great deal of insincerity behind it. In my address on graduation day last year I dwelt at some length on the subject of dishonesty among us. I ventured to suggest that dishonesty is our greatest vice—an ugly truth we cannot escape. But there is a still uglier side to it. It is dishonesty in religion.

It is one thing to reject religion altogether; it is quite another to accept it and not be true to it. The man who rejects religion because he is not convinced of its usefulness is an honest man; the one who accepts religion but betrays it in one way or another is a dishonest man. Failure in one's efforts to live up to the teachings of one's religion is understandable human weakness; but to pay only lip service to religion and not bother to live according to it, to perform religious rites and observances with scant regard for righteous conduct, to pose as a religious person and even be active in the religious field but live a life that contradicts one's faith, would be dishonesty. It is bad enough to be dishonest in mundane matters, but to be dishonest in religion, in the sphere of the spiritual, is dishonesty of the worst type.

Would it be honest for one to cling to a religion merely because it is the ancestral, traditional or national religion? It is true that religion becomes very much a part of man's culture, but still we cannot accept religion from the past in the same way as we would accept our language, our mode of dress, our manners and customs,

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Religion cannot really be inherited. Each individual has to make his or her own, by conviction, the faith that has been received.

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our arts and crafts. Religion necessarily has to be something profoundly personal, affecting our individual inner life. If we accept a religion either from tradition or by conversion, we have to honestly endeavour to live by its teachings. Religion cannot really be inherited. Each individual has to make his or her own, by conviction, the faith that has been received, and faithfully follow its teachings. To be nominally attached to a faith merely because it is the faith of our fathers would be a form of dishonesty.

In spite of the air of religiousness in our country and our manifold protestations of attachment to religion, it is no secret that ours is a society saturated with corruption and dishonesty of every sort, so widespread and so deep-rooted as to be endemic and almost a way of life with us. Crime is alarmingly on the increase, not merely crimes from human frailty as on sudden provocation, but cautiously calculated crime of every description, the perpetrators of which often manage also to escape being brought to book. We excel in the art of fraud of every possible brand. The terrifying spectre of terrorism has reared its head in our land and has already claimed several lives. Again and again communal strife has flared up when on both sides men have descended to the most inhuman and barbarous depths. Dishonesty has crept into public examinations. Ragging in its varied ugly forms is being indulged in with sadistic glee in our higher institutions of learning, in spite of repeated attempts to snuff it out. Large-scale trafficking in pornography and dangerous drugs is doing untold damage to our children and youth. Almost daily we read in the newspapers of violent deaths and suicides. All this and much more in a country that talks and boasts so much of its religiousness.

If on the one hand we claim to be religious and on the other our conduct belies it, the inevitable conclusion has to be that we are not honest to religion. It would indeed be a colossal self-deception if we should think we are a religious people but confine our religion

for the most part to traditional ceremonial without honest reform of our individual lives and of society.

POLITICS VITIATING RELIGION

Political encroachment on religion and religious encroachment on politics is another matter that has vitiated religion in Sri Lanka in modern times. From our ancient history we know that our kings were wont to take counsel from religious leaders or that the latter proffered advice to the rulers even in matters of state. But in our times we have the disturbing phenomenon of men of the cloth being actively engaged in party politics and, conversely, politicians making a cat's-paw of them for their own political purposes.

It is true that the clergy have civic rights as other citizens. It is also true that religious bodies such as the Buddha Sāsana and the Catholic Church should on the one hand be defenders of civil rights and fight against all manner of injustice, and on the other give their support and cooperation to any lawful government that respects the fundamental rights of the citizens. But it is quite another matter for the clergy to be actively involved in party politics, which more often than not leads to division and strife even among adherents of the same faith. As men committed to peace, amity and brotherhood, they should rather be detached and free from political alignment. Moreover, to take advantage of one's position as a religious leader to throw one's weight in favour of a particular party or politician would be tantamount to prostitution of religion.

It is true that our constitution gives a special place to Buddhism while guaranteeing freedom to other religions. Politicians who help to promote Buddhism are therefore acting in response to the constitution. But there is also the danger of the politician making use of religion or religious personnel to promote his own political interests. Service to religion by the politician has to be selfless and

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highly motivated. To seek political advantage through the medium of religion would be a desecration and exploitation of religion.

We have to educate our children and youth for life, for society, for the world of the future. In this, the elders, leaders and those in high places have to be an example and inspiration to them, especially on the point of honesty. In a society that gives so much prominence to religion, honesty must extend above all to religion and religious practice. Where we preach one thing and practice another, where we parade our religiousness but are not religious in fact, where there is observance of ritual but not righteous living, our children and youth will see insincerity and dishonesty, and will eventually lose respect for religion and for those who claim to profess it. We will thus be paving the way for them to drift into irreligion, secularism and materialism. May we hope that this is not the path we are treading.

YOUTH AND VIOLENCE

Address given as Rector of Aquinas College, Colombo,
at its Graduation Ceremony on 24 October 1983

Daily News, 25 October 1983

WE meet here today when the sad events of last July are still fresh in our minds. I cannot but refer to them, especially because they have a bearing on education itself. As educators we have to be concerned about what happened, about the involvement in particular of youth and adolescents of both sides in the tragic conflict, and about the repercussions it will have in the life of our future citizens.

Already much has been said and written in newspaper editorials, letters and articles on various aspects of the tragedy. The senseless destruction of property on a massive scale, the orgy of looting, and above all the heartless and barbarous destruction of human life have been condemned by all right-thinking people. A great deal of human misery, grief, humiliation and pain of mind has been caused by the burning down of homes, by the murder or mauling of a loved one, or by the loss of means of livelihood. People on both sides have suffered, and in most cases the victims were innocent people. Lanka which takes pride in calling itself a paradise turned into a hell. The catastrophe caused reverberations throughout the world.

It is true that on this occasion we witnessed the basest in man as well as the noblest. While there were those who in a frenzy of hate or with base ulterior motives, indulged in destruction and murder, there were also those who befriended the afflicted and gave them protection and succour even at great risk to themselves. Nevertheless as a nation we cannot but be ashamed of our conduct and admit that we on both sides are guilty and we have to deeply regret what we have done.

COLOSSAL MORAL COLLAPSE

The most deplorable aspect of the July events is undoubtedly the moral aspect. Behind the physical destruction of life and property

was a colossal moral collapse, perhaps the greatest moral disaster in the history of our country. Human actions, unlike those of animals, flow from the mind. It is when the mind is vicious that our actions become vicious and immoral. It is surprising that in a country which gives so much prominence to religion and where an atmosphere of religiousness prevails, a moral breakdown of such magnitude could have occurred.

The four great world religions are well represented here, and nearly all the citizens are adherents of one or the other. What religion teaches us to hate our fellowmen or to seek revenge from them? When Buddhism teaches us that hate is not overcome by hate but by loving kindness, when Christ tells us that if we are struck on one cheek we should offer also the other, what have we done? Have we not allowed hate to overpower us and lead us to an explosion of violence causing destruction and misery to fellow-humans? Are we justified in pursuing a policy of 'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth'? Are there no laws in the land and courts of justice to deal with offenders, without our having to take the law into our own hands and indulge in insane battering and butchery of fellow human beings?

Obviously those who were involved in such atrocities turned their backs on the teachings of their respective religious faiths. In spite of all our trumpet-blowing about religion and all the demonstrations of religious piety, we do not seem to be truly honest to our faiths. Perhaps many of us are Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims or Christians merely because we are born into these faiths, not that we have accepted them from conviction and are prepared to be guided by their teachings. How hollow and shallow our profession of religion is, and how much of hypocrisy and self-deception there is in our pompous parading of religion becomes painfully clear when on occasions like this we descend to the deepest depths.

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INVOLVEMENT OF YOUTH

The saddest part of the whole sordid episode is the involvement in it of youth, adolescents and even schoolchildren. It has been observed that many of those who went on the rampage, burning and looting, and hunting for their quarry, were young people. For them, to be part of the marauding mob was like being in a hunting party, enjoying the fun and taking delight in the embarrassment, humiliation, injury, pain and loss caused to others.

You will admit that it is sadistic and inhuman to seek satisfaction in wantonly giving pain even to an animal. What then shall we say of those who stooped to such a base and barbarous level as to take pleasure in seeing others subjected to suffering and misery? How could they have shouted 'Jayavēvā' when fellow-humans were being killed or their homes and possessions destroyed?

Whatever the revolutionary ideologies or political aims of these youth on either side, how could they be so heartless and unfeeling as to cause so much pain and suffering to other human beings? Have they become so ruthless and remorseless as to seek to attain their political goals by cold-blooded murder and senseless destruction? Or have they allowed themselves to be the tools of anarchy in their own homeland to serve the aims of foreign political schemers who would be happy to have a puppet regime in Sri Lanka or in a part of it, and gain strategic command of the Indian Ocean? We have to remember that the insurrection of 1971 was also for the most part the work of misguided youth.

A national moral disease among our youth which we have repeatedly tried to eradicate but failed is what is known by its mild imported term of 'ragging'. The corresponding Sinhala term 'Navaka Vadaya' is closer to the reality. What in its origin abroad was a form of fun that caused no pain to others has become

A national moral disease among our youth which we have repeatedly tried to eradicate but failed is what is known by its mild imported term of 'ragging'. The corresponding Sinhala term 'Navaka Vadaya' is closer to the reality.

Beasts may fight and kill one another, but they do not take pleasure in giving pain to other animals.

It is most unfortunate that the general tendency among people, whether in Sri Lanka or elsewhere, is to emphasize more the differences among human beings than their fundamental unity and oneness.

Behind all the differences, we are one race, the human race; we are one family, the human family; and we are therefore brothers and sisters.

Why should we in this country speak and act in terms of a majority community and a minority community? In reality there is only one community, the community of human beings.

It should be drilled into our children from their earliest years that they should see fellow-humans as brothers and sisters, without underscoring the differences.

in the hands of our youth a fine art to give vent to our basest instincts. We have made it an outlet for our sadistic passions. We have turned it into a vicious vehicle to cause humiliation, embarrassment, pain and suffering to others. Year after year we read in the press of the occurrence in our seats of learning of this morbid manner of seeking satisfaction.

Wasn't that same sadism that lurks behind our version of ragging evident also in the events of last July? Wasn't what happened a massive projection into the whole country of the type of ragging our youth are accustomed to? At least the spirit and the instincts were the same. The youth who indulged in violence did so apparently relishing the opportunity they had of obtaining satisfaction—the beastly satisfaction—of causing pain, injury and loss to fellow-humans. Maybe I am not quite correct in using the term 'beastly'. Beasts may fight and kill one another, but they do not take pleasure in giving pain to other animals.

WHAT IS THE CAUSE?

Why have so many of our youth and adolescents on both sides drifted into the path of violence? Retaliation on sudden provocation is understandable, but when death and destruction are carefully planned ahead and executed in cold blood, it is quite another matter. Whatever their objectives, how could our youth

be so unfeeling as to indulge in cold-blooded carnage and vandalism that is nationally self-destructive? How is it that they are not restrained and disciplined to desist from such criminal conduct? Is it that they have lost the sense of discipline that enables them to control their feelings and act rightly even in moments of crisis? Is this perhaps a result of deterioration of discipline in schools and in the society in which they have grown up and live today? How is it that they do not see that burning, killing, looting and destroying are wrong and totally opposed to the teachings of their respective religious faiths? Is it that the teaching of religion in our schools is faulty, that it is more a matter of making children take part in rites and ceremonies without being taught by word and more by the example of teachers and elders to live righteously according to religious teachings? Or is it that they have lost faith in religion altogether and turned nihilistic, seeing that there is so much of insincerity in the practice of it, in spite of all the ostentatious display of religiosity in the country? Has the schools' takeover of about a quarter century ago contributed in any way to the indiscipline and wayward drift of so many of our youth?

Those who have been deeply touched and dismayed by the events of last July have said that such a thing should never happen again. But can we be so confident? The future is in the hands of our youth and adolescents. The future will depend on what they are and what they will be. Hence this is a matter that should concern all those who have care of the education of our youth and children—parents, teachers, religious organizations and the state.

It is most unfortunate that the general tendency among people, whether in Sri Lanka or elsewhere, is to emphasize more the differences among human beings than their fundamental unity and oneness. Differences of various types there are, and there always will be. Some come from nature itself; some are man-made. Differences come from factors geographical, historical, cultural, religious, economic, etc. But all these differences are only really accidental, whatever importance we are inclined to attach to them. Behind all the differences, we are one race, the human race; we are one family, the human family; and we are therefore brothers and sisters.

Why then are we so engrossed in the differences? Why, for instance, should we in this country think, speak and act in terms of a majority community or a minority community? In reality there is only one community, the community of human beings. By

emphasizing and acting in terms of differences we are making this country a more and more miserable place. So it is with our whole planet.

It should therefore be drilled into our children from their earliest years that they should see fellow-humans as brothers and sisters, without underscoring the differences. They should be taught to have great regard and respect for the person and possessions of others, whoever they are. They should learn to see the wrong done by another as that of a fellow human being or fellow-citizen, not of a Sinhalese or a Tamil, a Buddhist or a Christian.

ELDERS TOO ARE GUILTY

Can we blame youth alone for what they have done and are doing? Perhaps elders too are guilty, at least indirectly, and have to take a share of the blame. If youth are being led into violence, it may be because of the dissatisfaction, discontent and disillusionment among them; it may be because elders have failed them. Revolutionary ideologies thrive where there is discontent. Have our youth been led to believe that even by the path of anarchy they should somehow capture power and establish a just society, in a part of the country or in the whole of it, whether you call it 'Eelam' or give it another name, because from their point of view, successive governments have failed? That was perhaps their goal in 1971 and again in 1983, and maybe they still have the same goal before them. In any case, they do have much to complain of.

From my experience of youth in the course of four decades I have been led to the conclusion that what they resent most is injustice and unfair treatment of them. Injustice is inevitable where those who hold political power see more to their own advantage than the country's good; where government policies, though of immediate advantage to politicians, have been short-sighted and consequently generated discontent; where the conduct of self-seeking politicians belies what they pretend to be and proclaim from public platforms; where influence, bribery or party links count more in job appointments than a candidate's personal worth and merit; where corruption is so rife that only those who can afford to pay the extra price can get a job done; where society is reeking of deceit, hypocrisy, insincerity, dishonesty and selfishness.

Today, after the events, there are various people—religious leaders, social workers, public-spirited citizens—who have come

forward with solutions to the problem. I wish they had been more active earlier, for the signs of the impending storm were there over a long period. I wish there had been before the crisis a more articulate condemnation and a strong public opinion on both sides against violence, thuggery, indiscipline and lawlessness whenever they occurred and whoever was responsible for them. I wish there had been on both sides faster action and more sincere, meaningful and constructive attempts to solve the ethnic problem. Marches across the country and the like may serve to capture public notice, but they are not likely to bring about an effective and lasting change in the situation. For that, there must be an all-out endeavour to purge society more radically of its evils, especially injustice, hypocrisy and dishonesty; there must be on both sides leaders of the highest integrity who, leaving politics aside, will humbly and disinterestedly work for the cause of peace and the well-being of the whole nation.

VALUE OF HUMAN LIFE

Address given as Rector of Aquinas College, Colombo,
at its Graduation Ceremony on 8 October 1984

Sun, 10 October 1984

OUR last Graduation Ceremony came a couple of months after the tragic events of July 1983. In my address last year I referred to those events as "a colossal moral collapse, perhaps the greatest moral disaster in the history of our country."

In the weeks and months that followed those dreadful days there was much soul-searching among well-meaning and sincere people who felt a sense of shame that the people of this country had been guilty of such outrageous conduct. Through the media and in private conversation they expressed deep regret and the fervent hope that what happened would never happen again.

But, although more than a year has passed by, no remedial solution to the problem has yet been found. Nor has the incidence of crime linked with the problem abated. The worst evil the past year has witnessed is the wanton destruction of human life. In fact, in the events of July 1983 and the events of the past year, the most deplorable aspect has been the senseless slaying of fellow human beings. Whether it be the murder of helpless prisoners or the cold-blooded killing of one's opponents, dealing death to defenceless fellow-humans is a barbarous and inhuman act.

IRRETRIEVABLE LOSS

A building that has been burnt down can be rebuilt; goods that have been looted can be replaced; a business enterprise that has been ruined can be set on foot again. In all these there is the possibility of restoration and recovery. But a human life that has been snuffed out cannot be brought to life again. To deprive a fellow-human of his precious life, be it the life of a Sinhalese or a Tamil or any other, is a dreadful, dastardly and despicable crime.

One can suffer loss; one can endure hardship and reverses; one can bear up pain and injury caused by others; one can build

up even from utter ruin; but in the case of death it is the end to everything. Even if a man wants to inflict injury on another, can he not at least spare his life? What a sad and tragic fate it is for one to suffer death at the hands of a brother human! Can a human being be so hardened as to deal a death-blow to a fellow-human who is alive and pulsating with life?

- Destruction is easy. An edifice that has taken years to build can be burnt down in an hour. So it is with life. One blow, one bullet, can bring to nought years of endeavour on the part of many to bring a human life to what it is now. The loving care of parents to bring up the child to youth and manhood, the labours of teachers to give him an education, the efforts made by oneself and others to protect that life from disease, personal endeavour to develop oneself and reach the present stage, what one could achieve in the future for oneself and fellow-humans—all that is brought to nothing in one instant. Accidents occur and people die, but is there any sense in the deliberate destruction of a human life?

Man does not live in isolation. One has parents, brothers and sisters. One has friends, companions and colleagues. A married person has a family. To kill a human being is not merely to deprive that individual of life, but also to cause grief, suffering and loss to the loved ones left behind. It means cruelly to damage the lives of many others—spouse, children, parents, friends. To kill a fellow-human means also to plunge the blade or the bullet into the hearts and lives of others who have to suffer the pain and agony of the loss. No compensation, even if paid, can make up for the loss of a loved one.

It is ironical that there are human beings who have little regard for the life of fellowmen in an age when at national and international level so much is being done, and so much spent, to save life, to protect life, to prolong life, to improve the quality of life. In fact, it

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If even in this enlightened age of the late twentieth century we cannot still solve our problems without killing one another, what progress have we made?

It is an irony that in a society that claims to be so religious there is such disregard for the sacredness of human life.

wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that all scientific, medical and technological knowledge has all along centred round life in one way or another. The present obsession with environmental pollution is again for the sake of life. When so much effort is being made to preserve life, it is absolutely senseless to cut down life so callously.

WHAT PROGRESS HAVE WE MADE?

We live in an age of enlightenment. During the past one hundred years man has made unprecedented progress in science and technology. He has succeeded in discovering and harnessing for his benefit such forces of nature as electricity and atomic power. His discoveries have revolutionized his life and enriched it in many ways. He has even succeeded in moving out of his planet into space and has set his foot on another heavenly body. But has man made progress also in the moral order, which is really the fundamental progress which he, as a human being, should attain? If even in this enlightened age of the late twentieth century we cannot still solve our problems without killing one another, what progress have we made?

We in Sri Lanka take pride in being a religious people. Our numerous temples, mosques and churches, our equally numerous wayside shrines, our religious festivals and rites proclaim to all the world our religious zest. But don't all religions regard life as sacred? Don't all religions condemn the killing of fellow-humans as a heinous crime? Not only in July 1983 but thereafter we have been killing one another. It is again an irony that in a society that claims to be so religious there is such disregard for the sacredness of human life.

Whatever the cause one has to fight for, can the wasteful destruction of human life be justified? Is a goal achieved by the senseless killing of fellowmen worthwhile? Isn't the use of the blade, the bullet or the bomb on defenceless people a cowardly act? Can one be satisfied with, or proud of, such a deed? Even if the goal is achieved, wouldn't the cold-blooded murder of innocent people be an indelible blot on those who have achieved it and those who come after them? Wouldn't the slain haunt their conscience ever after? Will history be proud of men who have gained their goal by the cowardly killing of fellow-humans?

Nobody really knows how many lives have so far been lost in the ethnic conflict that has been plaguing our country. But shouldn't we call a halt to this carnage? I am sure all right-thinking people will join me in a fervent appeal to all concerned to desist from killing one another. In the name of human life, which is the greatest and most sacred gift man possesses, we appeal to both sides to eschew all violence that will lead to destruction of human life. A victory gained, a goal achieved, by killing one another is no victory at all. It will be a victory if we resolve not to kill and remain faithful to that resolve. It will be a victory, and an achievement we can be proud of, if even by a long, slow and painful process we gain our goal, without destroying the lives of brother-humans.

SACREDNESS OF LIFE

Why should I dwell on a topic of this nature at an educational function, one might ask. The answer is not far to seek. As teachers and educators it is our duty to inculcate in the young a respect for the dignity of the human person, a respect and regard

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for the value and sacredness of life—something very fundamental to human existence and therefore to education. We cannot forget that there were youth and even teenagers involved in the rioting of July last year. We have also to bear in mind that children are by nature imitators of their elders. The repeated cold-blooded killings in our country cannot but have an unhealthy effect on youthful minds. If popping off a life has become almost a matter of course, can they be expected to regard life as something precious and sacred?

In fact, a tragic phenomenon in modern society is that already there is among youth a lack of regard for the preciousness of life. We know how the youth in particular succumb to the craving for a momentary and illusory euphoria by the use of drugs, regardless of the grave injury to one's life and sometimes to the lives of others. We have also to take serious note of the alarming incidence of suicide in our country. In this context, the callous killing of humans might lead to further deterioration of the morbid outlook on life that some youth seem to possess. We as teachers have to din into our children and youth that life, from the mother's womb until the last breath, is precious and sacred; that life, whether one's own or another's, should be respected, preserved, and lived to its fullness for the good of the individual and fellow human beings.

PIDGIN ENGLISH FOR SRI LANKA?

Article in the 'Daily News', 15 December 1984

WHEN two languages come into close contact due to social intercourse among those speaking them, it often happens that there is some mutual borrowing. The extent of borrowing will depend on the extent to which one language exerts influence over the other. This in turn will depend on various factors—political, social, cultural, religious—which play their part in the lives of those speaking the languages.

In the linguistic history of Sri Lanka we have interesting examples of the influence of one language on another, and borrowings by one from another. In the present inquiry I shall leave out structural changes brought about by the influence of one language on another, and confine myself only to vocabulary.

From the history of the Sinhala language we see how very much it was influenced by Pali and Sanskrit. The Sinhala vocabulary is full of words that have come into it from these languages, either in a derived form or as loanwords. Sometimes the same word appears in Sinhala in all the three forms, that is, Sanskrit, Pali and derived. Examples: *viśāla*, *visāla*, *visal*; *śālā*, *sālā*, *hala*. Tamil influence on Sinhala, too, has been considerable.

Apart from the fact that both Sanskrit and Pali influenced Sinhala to a very great extent, we know also that these languages were learnt by Sinhalese scholars, some of whom wrote books in the languages—books on religion, medicine, astrology, grammar, prosody, etc.

From the sixteenth century onwards Sinhala came under the influence of European languages as a result of the presence in the island of Western colonial powers—the Portuguese, the Dutch and the British. As in the case of Pali and Sanskrit, there were Sri Lankans who learnt the languages of their colonial masters—Portuguese, Dutch and English respectively—and made use of them in both speech and writing. At the same time these languages influenced Sinhala, with the result that loanwords from the three languages flowed into Sinhala.

Of the three European languages with which Sinhala had contact, it was Portuguese that influenced it most in the colonial period, largely due to Portugal's colonial policy of miscegenation. A large number of Portuguese words which became indigenized as Sinhala words are still in common daily use today—e.g. *janēla*, *sapattu*, *kalisam*, *kamisa*, *orlōsu*, *nattal*, *kasāda*.

When we examine the flow of words into Sinhala, especially from the European languages, we notice that the great majority of them are terms for objects, customs, practices, etc which have been introduced into Sri Lanka by the European nations that had colonial connections with it, especially the first colonial power, the Portuguese.

Sometimes there are words borrowed from European languages for objects for which, apparently, there are traditional Sinhala terms, but on close examination it will be found that the borrowed word originally denoted a particular type, shape or design of the article which was at the time new to the country. Thus *janēla* and *kavūluva* may today mean the same thing (window), but originally *janēla* was a special kind of broad window that came with Portuguese architecture.

All this to show that generally it was with new ideas, new objects and new practices that new foreign words came into Sinhala.

Viewed against this background of linguistic history, the new phenomenon, now so noticeable and widespread in this country, of

The new phenomenon, now so noticeable and widespread in this country, of larding Sinhala speech with English words is very much to be deplored.

There is the danger that this type of hybrid language, this mixture of English and Sinhala, this 'Singlish', already very widespread, will, if not effectively checked, lead to the evolution of a pidgin form of English in Sri Lanka.

It is surprising and regrettable that the tendency towards a pidgin English which adulterates Sinhala has made its appearance in independent Lanka when we should rather be proud of our own language and seek to preserve its purity.

larding Sinhala speech with English words is very much to be deplored. Today there is wide use of such expressions as—*job ekak karanava*, teach *karanava*, apply *karanava*, *mage* husband. It is in speech, not in writing (except sometimes in private letters) that this practice has appeared. What we are saying of Sinhala applies also to Tamil.

It is generally those who do not know enough English to converse freely in that language but nevertheless have some knowledge of it so that they can embroider their Sinhala with some English words who show a tendency to speak this sort of language. It may be that sometimes the coupling of English words with Sinhala is done to show off one's knowledge of English in spite of its being so meagre.

In any case, there is the danger that this type of hybrid language, this mixture of English and Sinhala, this 'Singlish', already very widespread, will, if not effectively checked, lead to the evolution of a pidgin form of English in Sri Lanka.

Is it that in addition to the three national languages we already have—Sinhala, Tamil, English—we are going to have a fourth, pidgin?

We know that there were pidgin forms of Portuguese in Portugal's colonies in the Indies, and there are pidgin varieties of English in some countries. The Kaffir slaves in Portuguese settlements spoke a form of pidgin, which was a mixture of Portuguese and their own vernaculars. A kind of pidgin English is spoken today in Papua New Guinea.

It should be noted that generally pidgin forms of language evolve among unlettered and backward peoples, and especially among people who do not have a well-developed language of their own. That was so in respect of the Kaffir slaves and the people of Papua New Guinea.

But in the case of the Sinhalese, by no means can it be said that they are an illiterate or a primitive people. Sri Lanka is known to be the most literate country in Asia after Japan. Besides, Sinhala is a language with a history going back to pre-Christian times, a language with a rich, varied and wide vocabulary, a language with an extensive literature in both verse and prose, and both classical and modern.

There is no reason therefore for the Sinhalese to resort to a pidgin form of English when they are intelligent enough and socially and culturally advanced enough to learn English (or any foreign

language for that matter) and use it well. They should at the same time value their own language, and be proud of it, and proud to use it, preserving its purity—without adulterating it by the importation into it of unnecessary English words.

It is true that in recent times we have had to borrow words from English for some scientific and technological terms, but that is obviously quite another matter. We have done so only because such words cannot be conveniently coined in Sinhala. But there is no excuse whatever for taking over into Sinhala such words as 'pay' (pay *karanava*), 'teach' (teach *karanava*) and 'marry' (marry *karanava*).

It might be argued why we couldn't say marry-*karanava* when we use the term *kasāda-bañdinava*. *Kasāda* is a foreign word (Portuguese) even as 'marry'. But it should be noted that originally *kasāda* was a term for a type of marriage new to Sri Lanka—marriage of a *casado* (a Portuguese settler), and therefore a Christian marriage. Today, however, there is no need to import the term 'marry' into Sinhala.

When Sri Lanka was under the British, many Sri Lankans learnt English and learnt it well, and used it well too, in both speech and writing. At the same time they were proud of their own language and did not permit it to be hybridized by the wanton borrowing of English words. In fact the loanwords that came into Sinhala from English at that time were few as compared with the Portuguese and Dutch words that were absorbed into Sinhala. Men like James D'Alwis, Mendis Gunasekera, W. F. Gunawardene, W. A. de Silva and D. B. Jayatilaka had an excellent command of English and were at the same time Sinhala scholars.

It is surprising and regrettable that the tendency towards a pidgin English which adulterates Sinhala has made its appearance in independent Lanka when we should rather be proud of our own language and seek to preserve its purity.

It seems to me therefore that in the interests of both English and Sinhala every effort should be made by parents, and especially by teachers and school heads, to arrest the present trend towards a pidgin English. When we were schoolchildren in the 'English' schools of those days, our teachers went to the extent of fining us when we spoke Sinhala—a measure to help us improve our English. Today it may be necessary to be equally strict to halt the spread of 'Singlish'.

We should insist on schoolchildren speaking either English or Sinhala, but not a mixture of both. It may be difficult, and perhaps it is already too late, to get adults who have got used to this type of language to give it up. But if we look after the present generation of schoolchildren and make a concerted effort to stamp out the practice of mixing English and Sinhala, we might succeed. A strong public opinion against this practice would be an asset. There is need therefore to create such a public opinion.

PROBLEMS OF YOUTH

Address given as Rector of Aquinas College, Colombo,
at its Graduation Ceremony on 23 September 1985

Catholic Messenger, 29 September 1985

AQUINAS is an institution which, like the universities, provides education mainly to youth. In this international year of youth it would be relevant therefore to direct our thoughts to the needs and problems of youth in our country. I need hardly say that all is not well with our youth. Many countries have youth problems, but in Sri Lanka the youth have in recent years become a problem of national proportions. The leaders of the country, both civil and religious, should therefore regard this problem as one of the highest priority and take effective steps towards improving the situation.

International years have come and gone, sometimes with a great deal of fanfare, but can we be satisfied with the results they have produced? Newspaper articles, talks, conferences, seminars, competitions and the like certainly have their usefulness, but have we brought about the desired radical changes in society in relation to the theme of each year? I do hope that the present year which focuses our attention on the all-important subject of youth will bring us better results, at least where our country is concerned.

SENSE OF GRIEVANCE AND FRUSTRATION

We have to take note of the fact that there is among our youth a sense of grievance and frustration which from time to time drives them to belligerent action and even violence. Was it not mainly by the youth that the insurrection of 1971 was planned and put into execution? In the ethnic conflict which has become a national calamity, is it not mainly the youth who are active in the various liberation organizations which resort to violence and are engaged in terrorist activity? In both these disasters haven't many young precious lives been lost and others warped by bitterness, rancour and hate? Were not youth prominently involved in the orgy of

destruction of July 1983? Isn't there among the youth of our institutions of higher education a great deal of restlessness and discontent which again and again erupts in the form of agitations, rioting and strikes, not to speak of violent and sadistic modes of ragging? Is it not mainly youth who are involved in sophisticated and movie-type crimes in broad daylight, unlike the traditional thief who comes stealthily in the night? Is it not mainly youth again who are driven into the delusive dreamworld of dangerous drugs? Is it not a fact that in the case of suicide, which in this country has reached alarming proportions, youth are the majority of the victims? Do we not see more and more of our youth drifting away from religion and the traditional social values that sustained our forefathers? Is it not youth for the most part who are enticed into ideologies which on the one hand wean them away from religion and on the other endorse and encourage violent revolution? When we take all these into consideration we cannot easily dismiss the fact that there is a deep-seated malaise affecting the youth of our country. Every effort should therefore be made to study and analyse the problem, inquire into its causes, and search for the remedies that may help to put things right.

Human problems are generally complex. So is the youth problem. There are many causes for the sad situation in which so many of our youth find themselves. Elders are naturally inclined to blame the youth themselves for their waywardness, rebelliousness and misdeeds. There is no doubt that, being youths,

International years have come and gone, sometimes with a great deal of fanfare, but can we be satisfied with the results they have produced?

Whatever the rosy pictures painted in public speeches, whatever our public demonstrations of religiosity, the common man knows only too well that ours is a society reeking of corruption, fraud, dishonesty and hypocrisy of every shade.

The importance of the mother tongue cannot be gain-said, but at the same time we have to take cognizance of the practical usefulness, nay necessity, of a world language like English.

In a society where there is corruption, as ours notoriously is, injustice is inevitable, for it is the one who can afford to pay the extra price who can get things done.

When corruption has so infected the fabric of social and public life that it is condoned and regarded as normal, then we have reached the deepest depths of our downward drift.

not infants, they are responsible for their actions, and have to take a large part of the blame. But are they the only ones to blame? I am afraid not. The youth could very well point their finger at their elders and tell them that they too are to blame, and to a great extent. They too have contributed in various ways to the sorry plight into which the youth have been driven.

MORALLY POLLUTED SOCIETY

In the first place, into what kind of a society are our young born? In what kind of a society do they have to live and grow up? Whatever the rosy pictures painted in public speeches, whatever our public demonstrations of religiosity, the common man knows only too well that ours is a society reeking of corruption, fraud, dishonesty and hypocrisy of every shade.

One thing youth resent is hypocrisy. When they know that the reality is very different from the make-believe of public political pronouncements, when they see that there are elders and leaders who wear a righteous façade but are different in private life, when they are asked to believe that all is well when it is not, or when they are promised a future which they fear will not come, they feel they are cheated. Can we blame them if they lose faith in their elders?

They lose faith in religion itself when they see that in spite of the air of religiousness in the country and all the ostentatious demonstrations of religious practice, religion has failed to lead men to righteous living. It would be unfortunate indeed if we are led to a situation where our youth will no longer draw sustenance from religion but regard it only as a cultural relic from the past.

Today we are much concerned about environmental pollution because it is harmful to our physical life. But what about the moral pollution of our society in which our children and youth have to

shape and fashion their future? Can we blame them alone if they too are infected by the canker of corruption and dishonesty?

We hear it repeatedly said that there is cribbing at public examinations. But can we blame students if in the society in which they live corruption is rampant and dishonesty a tacitly accepted way of life? The students seem to be saying to themselves: What's the harm in our copying a bit when our elders, big and small, are also dishonest in so many ways? What we are doing is insignificant compared with the frauds and shady dealings of our elders.

Another thing youth greatly resent is injustice. Unfortunately a great deal of injustice has been generated due to the short-sighted policies, chiefly educational, of the country's leaders of the past several decades. Take for instance university admissions. There should really be only one criterion for admission, namely merit. But because of the great imbalance in quality education between the urban and the rural schools, the merit criterion cannot be strictly applied, since students of backward areas will be shut out of the universities. The quota system, on the other hand, while bringing students of backward areas into the universities, shuts out qualified students of city schools. The attempt to right one wrong has led to another.

If decades ago, educational planners had opened centrally-situated and well-equipped A/L colleges in backward areas, providing the usual two-year A/L course plus an extra preparatory year to bring rural O/L students up to standard, the students of these colleges would have reached a high standard and been able to compete with the students of the urban schools. Admission to universities could then have been made strictly on merit and no injustice would have been done.

LANGUAGE POLICY—CAUSE OF FRUSTRATION

Another matter that causes frustration to youth is the language policy in education. The importance of the mother tongue cannot be gainsaid, but at the same time we have to take cognizance of the practical usefulness, nay necessity, of a world language like English, without which we cannot communicate with the outside world, nor have access to world knowledge. In the nineteen fifties the *svabhāṣā* slogan helped politicians of the day to achieve their political goals, but today we see from the results of that policy that it was not in the best interests of education. The university student

studying in *svabhāṣā* has to depend for the most part on lecture notes as his source of knowledge. He cannot widen his knowledge and vision—which a university student must do—by access to the vast store of knowledge available in English. He comes out of the university, with a limited knowledge of his subject and a still more limited general knowledge, to swell the ranks of the educated unemployed.

The Ministry of Youth Affairs and Employment of the present government has been sending unemployed graduates to this institution to be taught English with a view to helping them to secure employment—a most praiseworthy venture. Students like them are a frustrated and disappointed lot. They find that, in spite of a university degree, for which they had had to work very hard for three or four years, they are still ill-equipped for employment. They feel they have been let down by educational planners.

There was a time when the English-educated few were at an advantage over the vernacular-educated majority. To rectify this there was the enthusiastic switch-over to *svabhāṣā*, ignoring English. In spite of *svabhāṣā* education even up to university level, it is still those who have a command of English who are in the advantageous position of being able to secure employment in this country and abroad. Whatever the language policy in education, the people have come to realize the value of English and consequently there is a big demand for it today. Our School of English is crowded with over two thousand adult students learning English, among them seventy-five Buddhist monks and many university students. Obviously there has been something wrong in our language policy and planning.

Furthermore, the *svabhāṣā* policy has been one of the root causes of the ethnic conflict. It divided the pupils from the kindergarten to the university. It divided the nation. English could well have served as the link language binding the people of this country together. Language, moreover, is not merely a cultural element, but has pragmatic values. We have seen that it is linked to employment. The experience of youth that *svabhāṣā* education does not adequately equip them for employment is in fact one of the grievances of those who are agitating for a separate state where they can have a different language policy more advantageous to them.

CORRUPTION GENERATES INJUSTICE

In a society where there is corruption, as ours notoriously is, injustice is inevitable, for it is the one who can afford to pay the extra price who can get things done. Others who do not have the wherewithal to pay it or are unwilling to stoop to corrupt practices will unavoidably suffer injustice. When corruption has so infected the fabric of social and public life that it is condoned and regarded as normal, then we have reached the deepest depths of our downward drift.

Young people will not mind personal disappointment if only justice is done. They will not grudge, for instance, if employment is given to a more qualified candidate, but if a less qualified person is brought in by influence, favouritism or corrupt manoeuvres, they will very strongly resent it. When merit is set aside and it is other criteria that triumph, the frustration and bitterness the youth experience is very great. It is not surprising that young people, who have the future before them and are concerned about it, want in desperation to change the social order even by revolution and violence. But they are not the only ones to blame for it.

To inspire hope, trust and confidence in our youth, there must be sincerity, honesty and integrity on the part of their elders and leaders. The youth do not want to be duped and cheated by men who, in spite of all their protestations of service to the nation, seek their own gain. They will have confidence, not in self-seeking leaders, but in those who honestly work for the good of the country, following policies beneficial to the country, not to themselves. They will have faith in men who practise what they preach, whose personal life conforms to the image they project before the public. They will be prepared to be led by men who can be trusted to be just and fair to them and in whose integrity they can have the fullest confidence.

FOR A SAFER WORLD

Address given as Rector of Aquinas College, Colombo,
at its Graduation Ceremony on 18 August 1986

Taprobane (Monthly), September 1986

WE who are engaged in the education of youth cannot but be concerned about changes, trends and developments in society, for these affect the youth far more than other people, since they are the citizens of tomorrow. The future is theirs; they are being educated and prepared for it; they look forward to it; they have to face it with all its problems; they hope for a future that will be a peaceful and happy one for them. It should be the concern therefore of parents and teachers, but far more of leaders in society, of governments and international bodies, to make this world a safe and secure place for the citizens of tomorrow.

But daily events throughout the world give us cause for concern and alarm as to what the future might be. The signs are that the world is becoming more and more an unsafe place for humans. It is true that man has made great progress in science and technology which has been of immense benefit to him, but in that very progress lies also grave danger to human life and well-being which brings also the element of fear, anxiety and uneasiness into our lives. One begins to wonder if the dominant factor in human life in the twenty-first century is going to be fear.

INSECURITY OF LIFE

Recently the First Lady of the United States confessed how anxious and worried she was whenever the president went out in public. The assassination of President John Kennedy and his brother Robert, of Martin Luther King, of S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike of Sri Lanka, Indira Gandhi of India, and Olof Palme of Sweden are recent events. Attempts have been made on the life of President Reagan and Pope John Paul II. In spite of all the security expertise of modern times, the protection of the life of leaders remains a

problem. In fact today, far more than in the past, “uneasy lies the head that wears a crown.”

In the modern world it is not only ‘crowned heads’ that have to live uneasy lives but even the ordinary man. This again is largely an outcome of the progress man has made in science. Even if he succeeds in averting nuclear war and the consequent global holocaust, there can be accidents causing extensive destruction and damage, precisely because of the enormous power of the forces of nature man has discovered and is seeking to use. Such accidents have occurred again and again, sometimes with deadly and devastating results. We cannot forget the Bhopal tragedy in neighbouring India which brought death to 2000 and caused injury to 200 000. We do not yet know the extent of the damage to human life that will result from the Chernobyl disaster.

Science has made faster modes of travel possible, but this has also brought with it destruction and death. In the age of the bullock cart there were hardly any accidents on the roads, but today, in spite of all measures to reduce accidents, so many are killed on the roads, so many injured. Last year the number of persons killed in automobile accidents in the United States was 43,500. Police reports say that in Sri Lanka there is a road accident every half hour and an average of three persons die every day on the roads. We are paying a heavy price for the advantage of speedy travel.

The very atmosphere that surrounds us and is so vital to our existence on this planet is being contaminated, polluted and made injurious to human life—another outcome of scientific and technological progress. What has been jokingly said as advice to the tourist, namely, “in an under-developed country don’t drink the water, in a developed country don’t breathe the air” expresses the grave danger to life from environmental pollution.

What happened at Bhopal and Chernobyl were accidents and therefore unintended, but what about the intentional use of science

The signs are that the world is becoming more and more as unsafe place for humans.

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and technology by man to cause destruction to brother man? The secretive use of explosive weapons has again and again caused death or injury to innocent people. This form of violence has become a curse in the modern world. The ordinary man going about his normal duties does not have the security safeguards of state leaders. He might meet death in the street, in a public building, on a bus, train or plane, in a hotel, at an airport. The possibility of violent death at an unexpected place or moment brings fear and insecurity into the lives of ordinary people.

EVILS OF TERRORISM

In former times armies met in battle in defence of their rights or causes, and there were internationally accepted laws governing the conduct of war. Today terrorism has replaced conventional war and is being resorted to in many parts of the world. As the term implies, it is intended to and does bring terror into human society. Political leaders glibly talk of wiping out terrorism, but can it ever be realized? An army can fight another army and destroy it, as has happened in history, but in the case of terrorism one has to fight an unseen enemy, who respects no law.

The war in respect of terrorism is a war of wits in the use of science, the terrorist using science to cause destruction, and security agencies using science to avert it. In this war, the terrorist is in a more advantageous position, precisely because of the secretive nature of his operations. It may be possible to minimise the evils of terrorism, but it can hardly be destroyed. Man will have to live with it; he will have to live in fear.

It is a regrettable fact that although man has made progress in science, he has not made progress as *man*.

What is wrong is not scientific progress but the abuse of science.

Man has reached an age of enlightenment in the use of science, but is not enlightened himself.

Man's progress has been partial and lop-sided—progress in the material sphere, not in the spiritual and moral.

Violence as a weapon against brother humans is un-human and an insult to human nature and dignity.

Twentieth-century man has reason to congratulate himself that science has greatly improved the quality of his life, that science has made human life more comfortable. But of what use is all this if he has to live in fear? Physical comforts alone cannot make him happy. He can in fact live without them. But he cannot be happy without peace of mind, which can come only from good relations with fellowmen. If he has to live in fear of other humans, just as he fears wild animals, what happiness can he have in human society?

ABUSE OF SCIENCE

Fear of nuclear war and the global destruction that comes with it, fear of danger from forces of nature man is seeking to harness, and, worst of all, fear of fellow man—will all this be the lot of humanity in the world of tomorrow? It is a regrettable fact that although man has made progress in science, he has not made progress as *man*. This is the crux of the problem. What is wrong is not scientific progress but the abuse of science. Man has reached an age of enlightenment in the use of science, but is not enlightened himself. He has gained mastery over the physical world and the powers of nature but not mastery over himself. He has not attained moral progress that would make him seek solutions to his problems in other ways than violence—violence which as a weapon against brother humans is un-human and an insult to human nature and dignity. Man's progress has been partial and lopsided—progress in the material sphere, not in the spiritual and moral.

This is a situation fraught with grave danger for the future of man—a situation that will make the world more and more an

A world without violence is the goal that humanity should collectively seek to attain, however hard and elusive its realization.

'Make the world safe' should be a cry ringing in the ears of everyone.

The greatest treasure we can give to the world of tomorrow—what it desperately needs—is to make it a safe place for future humans.

unsafe place for humans. It may become necessary in the world of tomorrow not only to seek ways of arms control but also the control of scientific progress itself—at least certain aspects of it—lest man should create Frankenstein monsters that will destroy him.

National and world leaders have the awful responsibility of making the world a safe place for the citizens of tomorrow—the youth of today. This is a new responsibility which trends and developments in human society have brought upon them. But this is not a task for leaders only. A world without violence is the goal that humanity should collectively seek to attain, however hard and elusive its realization. 'Make the world safe' should be a cry ringing in the ears of everyone. In the past, men have bequeathed to posterity great treasures in art, architecture, sculpture, painting, music, literature, learning. The greatest treasure we can give to the world of tomorrow—what it desperately needs—is to make it a safe place for future humans.

ENGLISH IN SRI LANKA

Address given as Rector of Aquinas College, Colombo,
at the Graduation Ceremony on 27 July 1987

Daily News, 17 August 1987

IT is a remarkable fact that the language of a country so small as England has in the course of history spread over so large a part of the globe and become the most widely spread language in the world. Not only in countries colonized by the British and in others which were once under British rule and are now independent, but even in countries which have not been colonially or politically subject to Britain, English is being used more and more, especially in the scientific and business fields. Modern mass media have accelerated the spread and use of English throughout the world. It used to be said that the sun never set in the British empire. The British empire is no more. But there is another empire, the empire of the language of the British, which is more vast, vaster than any empire we have known.

Of the three European languages brought into this country by foreign powers, two, Portuguese and Dutch, have bequeathed to our national languages, Sinhala and Tamil, quite a number of their words, which are in common use to this day, but the languages themselves have not survived in the country. If, on the other hand, English has survived, it is not merely because it is the language of the most recent of our colonial masters, but more because of its wide use in the world, and consequently its practical usefulness for us.

When under British rule English became the language of administration in Sri Lanka on the recommendation of the Colebrooke Commission (1831), the study of English became a matter of vital importance for employment purposes. Schools were opened in which English was not only taught as a subject but was also the medium of instruction. They came to be known as 'English Schools'. They were opened mainly in urban areas. In rural districts there were schools of lower grade in which teaching was done in the languages of the country, Sinhala or Tamil. They were

called 'Vernacular Schools'. This dual system of schools continued up to about the middle of the present century.

This language policy of the government had results both good and bad. It united the people of the country in one way, but divided them in another way. English education brought together the country's leaders of the various communities—Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims, Burghers—to fight unitedly for Sri Lanka's independence, which they ultimately won. But the dual system of English and vernacular schools divided the people classwise. Since English was the key to better employment, especially in the public sector, the English-educated minority had the opportunity to rise to a higher level, socially, culturally and economically.

In view of this disparity, the vernacular-educated masses had a grievance. Their discontent, which had grown for over a century, was a situation that could be politically exploited, and this was done, and the government that came into power, helped by the *svabhāṣā* cry, took steps, in the nineteen fifties, to move towards the use of the *svabhāṣā* in administration and education. The Sinhala Only Bill was passed on June 15, 1956. The *svabhāṣā* were made the media of instruction from the kindergarten to the university. English, which had reigned for so long was not only dethroned but relegated to the background, while the national languages were enthroned, with Sinhala as the official language. It was a swing from one extreme to the other. The unfriendly attitude towards English was

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a psychological reaction against the privileged position it had held all this time.

The new language policy again divided the nation, this time on the basis of the national languages themselves, Sinhala and Tamil. It was a division, not only linguistic but also ethnic, since each language was identified with an ethnic section of the population. This division is in fact one of the causes of the ethnic conflict that has become a national catastrophe in Sri Lanka.

Apart from that, the switchover to *svabhāṣā* has been damaging to education itself, especially higher education. The university student's knowledge of English is pitifully meagre. The intensive coaching in English on admission to the university is all too brief and insufficient to give the student a command of the language adequate for practical use. It is because university students themselves realize the inadequacy of such coaching that year after year large numbers of them from the various campuses have been joining our English courses. But this attempt to learn English is too late. They should have a good command of the language at the time they commence their university studies—which now is not the case.

As a result of the ignorance of English, the academic knowledge of university students is confined to the notes given them in *svabhāṣā* by their lecturers. They are not in a position to take advantage of the vast store of knowledge available to them through the medium of English. In this situation it is inevitable that the products of our universities fail to reach higher standards qualitatively. One begins to wonder if it is because university students are unable to make better use of libraries that they have so much time for agitations, factional quarrels, strikes, etc. It is a disturbing thought, moreover, that in subjects like medicine inadequate knowledge can lead to disastrous consequences affecting the lives of others.

Because of the current language policy in education, the university student has to face another serious problem. It is the difficulty in obtaining suitable employment after graduation. In the years, 1982 to 1985 we had several hundreds of unemployed graduates sent to us by the Youth Employment Planning Division of the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Employment. They were to be taught English at this institution, in the expectation that proficiency in English would help them get jobs. From our contact

with these graduates we saw, in the first place, how poor their knowledge of English was when they came to us, and secondly how frustrated they were that, after so many years of hard work and so much expense, they were still unable to find employment. Others less qualified academically but possessing a better command of English had a better chance of getting jobs in this country or abroad.

There is no doubt that students must know their mother tongue well, but at the same time we cannot overlook the fact that in the context of our times a good knowledge of English is essential for university education, if not also for higher secondary education. Right from the primary grades, students should be taught English and taught well, so that at a certain stage of their secondary education they should be able to switch over to English as the medium of instruction. This would be possible only if we had good teachers—which is something deplorably lacking today, especially in rural schools.

Today a student who has obtained a Credit pass in English at O/L does not know much English. To appoint such a one to teach English in schools, as is done now, is like asking the blind to lead the blind. This situation leads to a vicious circle. The teacher is a product of the present educational system. The teacher's knowledge is poor because the teaching is poor. The teaching is poor because the teacher's knowledge is poor. And so it goes on. The language that is fast spreading and is likely to become a new national language in Sri Lanka is a strange mixture of English and the vernacular, a pidgin English, which is neither English nor Sinhala or Tamil, and which is a disgrace to both English and our national languages. Such forms of usage as 'teach *karanava*' and 'pay *karanava*' are extremely common today.

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W. L. A. DON PETER is academically and professionally an educationist, although he has made a name also as a historian and writer of children's fiction. He holds three higher degrees in Education from London University (M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D.); has been head of the three major Catholic educational institutions in Colombo—the Archdiocesan Seminary College (1956-61), St Joseph's College (1961-71) and Aquinas College of Higher Studies (1971-74, 1979-87); and has thrice been president of the Sri Lanka Conference of Headmasters and Headmistresses (1967-68, 1968-69, 1970-71). He has represented Sri Lanka at several international educational conferences. He is a Missiology graduate of the Pontifical Urbanian University in Rome and a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society of Great Britain.

Apart from placing before the public his educational ideas, views and suggestions through the medium of articles and addresses, he has also been an outspoken critic of state educational policy when such criticism was called for.

He is the author, among other works, of 'Studies in Christian Education' (1974), 'Education in Sri Lanka under the Portuguese' (1978), and 'Francis Xavier, Teacher of Nations' (1987).

In 1967 he was conferred a prelateship (Domestic Prelate) by Pope Paul VI in recognition of his services to education.

EXTRACTS FROM EDITORIALS

The Rector of St Joseph's College [Rev. Dr W. L. A. Don Peter] in a forthright analysis of the educational body on prize-day dissected surgeon-wise the many ills that assail it...This is as fearful a catalogue of the ominous signs of education deterioration as that which any vigilant sentinel of education could summon. The Rector of St Joseph's has alerted parents, who in the name of their children and of the future, must whip up nation-wide opinion and immediately arrest these downward trends.

—*Daily Mirror*, 13 July 1964

'Heroic survival' is right. This was the expression the Rector of St Joseph's College, Colorabo, used in reference to private non-fee-levying schools which have continued to exist in the face of formidable obstacles...Fr Don Peter makes a pertinent point when he asks what you would think of a law which stipulates that, for instance, private hospitals (of which there are many) should not charge fees...Is there no sense of honour at government level?

—*Times of Ceylon*, 28 July 1967

Seldom has Ceylon basked in such a sunburst of scorching truth as that which blazed from the lips of the Rector of St Joseph's College, Mgr Don Peter, in his presidential address at the Conference of Ceylon Headmasters and Headmistresses over the weekend...For once we had the full and free flow of the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. It is a most refreshing and heart-warming experience to see a public man at a public place, without the least regard for the consequences, courageously pour out the undiluted, unadulterated truth, come what may.

—*Daily Mirror*, 30 September 1968

Fr Don Peter has been bold enough to declare that dishonesty has assumed such proportions in our society that, to his mind, it has become our greatest national vice...No matter what slander is hurled at him, he would have rendered a national service if his stern reproach awakens others to the truth growing around us...We are again plainly witnessing the spectacle of a wise man seeking the aid of some candle light, even by day, to search out an honest man.

—*Daily News*, 22 July 1981

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